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# Howdy's Whistle

Anne Archbold Miller

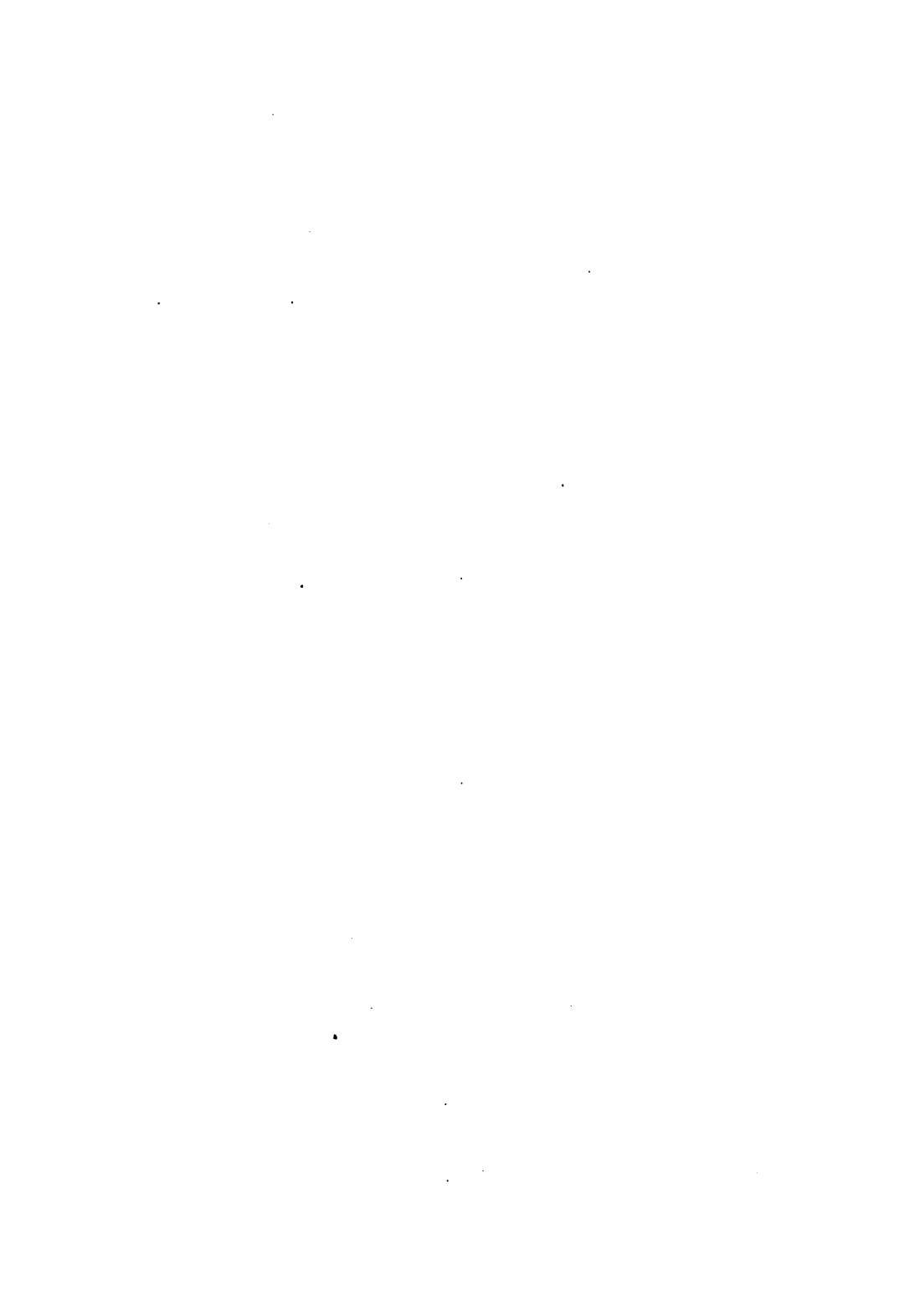
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Gleeg  
'n' Good"



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# **HULDY'S WHISTLE**





# **HULDY'S WHISTLE**



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*"Whistle"*

# HULDY'S WHISTLE

BY  
ANNE ARCHBOLD MILLER

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*"Puttin' Glory into Good"*



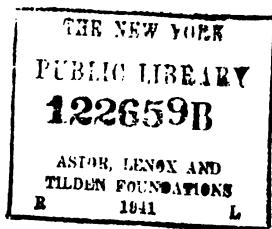
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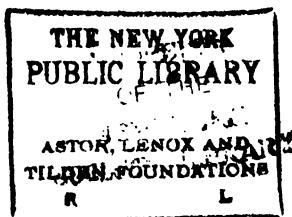
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*Made in U. S. A.*



*Huldy's Whistle*

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*Dedicated  
to  
Miss Bettes Schuyler Colfax  
with an inside politeness  
that is spelled  
L-o-v-e*

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# HULDY'S WHISTLE

## CHAPTER I

### LOCATING AN ANCESTOR

**Y**OU see, the trouble lay in the fact that Whistle was n't a bit as one might quite properly have expected him to be. He was n't beautiful and dainty and nimble and fascinating and wavy-haired, like Mother; nor was he dignified and studious and alert and handsome and courteous, like Father. He did not seem to have inherited one of these desirable qualities, not even in pocket-edition form. Although Mother never spoke of these deficiencies to anyone but Father, and Father never spoke of them to anyone but Mother, all the intimates and near-intimates of the family spoke of them very freely to one another. And Father and Mother felt

no hesitancy in speaking of them very freely to Whistle himself.

Mother had often said that she wondered if anyone in Father's family had been at all like Whistle—anyone from whom he might, perhaps, have inherited his looks or his traits of character. And Father had in turn, in a perfectly courteous way, and just as a matter of wonderment, too, made the same suggestion in regard to Mother's family. But it was not until the arrival of Great Aunt Eloise that the proper ancestor was located.

The revelation had been made with dramatic unexpectedness.

On the morning of that fateful day, Whistle had left home with Mother's admonitions ringing in his ears. "Be back early," she had cautioned him. "Great Aunt Eloise will arrive at five o'clock, and you must be here in plenty of time to wash up and be made presentable."

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Thus instructed (needlessly, it seemed to Whistle), he had immediately quitted the house, and a few seconds later was to be seen scurrying down the street in the direction of the Willises.

Morning wore away swiftly in a succession of happy hours, and afternoon came on. Two o'clock, three o'clock, four o'clock—still Whistle lingered. He was considering fresh fields to conquer when, suddenly, he caught his name in the air.

"O Whistle, Whistle boy!"

It was the clear, sweet voice that Whistle always seemed to hear, no matter how far away he might be. It was Huldy's voice, and it never failed to bring him on the run.

As he came up, flushed and panting, to where Huldy stood on the Willises' back porch, she noted with concern a deep red scratch which extended the full length of his right cheek.



Huldy smothered down an inward sigh, but outwardly, she smiled an unusually luminous smile, even for Huldy.

Whistle's hand went involuntarily to his cheek as he panted, "O Huldy, ain't it awful! Ain't it just my luck! And Great Aunt Eloise coming this afternoon; and she such a high-feeler!"

"That's just wot I'm a-callin' ye fer, lovey! Yer maw telephoned fer ye to come home an' git dressed—that yer aunt 'ud be there in a hour."

"O gee!" cried Whistle, heaving a tremendous sigh. "I thought she was n't coming till five o'clock."

"It's four an' after now, dearie! Just ye come in an' let me slick up yer hair a bit; then ye kin git dressed quicker after ye git home."

"O Huldy, you look just that good and kind that I know I must be a fearful sight!"

sighed Whistle as he ran up the steps and followed Huldy into the house.

"Well, well! Looks ain't on the outside after all, an' they ain't nothin' could make ye look anythin' but be-u-tiful to me!"

"You see, Huldy, I could n't really help the scratch," said Whistle apologetically. "The White's old tom-cat was chasing Hank's chickens something awful. I got mixed up with the cat, and he up and scratched me! But how could I help it? I was n't going to stand around and see him chasing Hank's chickens. How can I face Mother and Father and—and Aunt Eloise for the first time, looking like this? Gee, Huldy, but it does seem 's if I have more 'n my share of troubles."

"Well, lovey, ye know I'm allus a-tellin' ye thet they ain't no trouble so big that it can't put a heap o' glory into good. We jest got to learn to rejice in tribilations; an'

Whistle boy, b'lieve me, I've seen them as wuz the very worst put the most glory into good."

While Huldy was speaking, she was deftly and vigorously maneuvering a wet brush on Whistle's shock of coarse red hair, which was really beginning to settle into something like docility.

"Well, Great Aunt Eloise looks to me like some tribilation," agreed Whistle, "and from what I've heard Father tell about her, it 'ud make me hump some to think *she* could put a whole lot of glory into good."

"I wuz n't meanin' thet yer aunt wuz a tribilation, Whistle, lovey. I can't help but feel her comin' is goin' to be a real blessin'. Now, ye jest run home an' put on yer white pants an' yer brown and white striped shirt, ef it's clean, an' thet yellor tie that sets well with yer hair an' eyes."

"O Huldy, you're such a comfort," said



*Huldy smothered down an inward sigh, but outwardly she smiled an unusually luminous smile, even for Huldy .*

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Whistle bashfully, giving her a hug that nearly toppled her over. Then, heaving a tremendous sigh, he dashed out the door and down the street.

Mother was standing at the gate anxiously awaiting his coming.

Whistle felt the scratch on his face assuming enormous proportions as he advanced.

"Whistle! Where *have* you been? What has happened to your face? O Whistle, why *will* you try me so? Just go in and see what a sight you are! And Great Aunt Eloise is so particular, and it's her very first visit to our home and the first time—she's—ever—seen—you!" Here Mother's voice quavered off almost into a sob. "Go straight upstairs and get washed and dressed! O, what will Father say!"

Whistle swallowed hard, made all four of the porch steps at one leap, and never stopped until he had locked the door of his

own room behind him. Then he caught a glimpse of himself in the glass.

He stood several minutes regarding his mutilated likeness with dogged hopelessness. "Ain't Huldy a wonder!" he quavered yearningly. "If it was n't for her, I don't b'lieve I'd even try to face this partickler tribilation. I wish everybody could look out of Huldy's eyes at everything—me in partickler."

## CHAPTER II

### THE WILLISES' HIRED GIRL

**G**REAT AUNT ELOISE had already established herself in the household when Whistle tardily appeared.

Indeed, he had hardly entered the room, with his scratch and his white trousers, his brown-and-white striped shirt and his yellow tie, when Aunt Eloise gave a little shriek, and then applied her lorgnette to further justify the shriek.

"So like his Great Uncle George!" she gasped. "Ah, indeed, so like his Great Uncle George!"

Now Father had never heard that he had a Great Uncle George, and Mother had never heard that she had a Great Uncle George, and for a moment they both made a wild ancestral survey, Mother meantime



quite forgetting the fact that Aunt Eloise was a great aunt of Father's, and that she really was not in the least responsible. When she did wake up to this fact, purely through a remark addressed to Father by Aunt Eloise, there was, if I mistake not, a very little look of triumph in her eyes and a slightly upward toss of her dainty head.

"Julian, you surely remember hearing your Grandfather Foster speak of his poor brother George? Ah, me! on second thought, doubtless you have not, for I believe your grandfather was not in the habit of mentioning him. Wonderful family pride your grandfather had, Julian. Of course, there may not be a noticeable resemblance, but you may judge for yourselves; you may judge for yourselves. I have his likeness in my heirloom trunk, which I brought because I knew it would be of such interest to you. Ah, yes, a sad circumstance!"

## The Willises' Hired Girl 25

Aunt Eloise would have said more, but Mother, seeing Father's distressed look, began to gently untie the visitor's bonnet-strings and quietly interrupted:

"Aunt Eloise, dinner is waiting, and I know you must be very hungry!"

Aunt Eloise was a perfect lady, all the family were—all except those who were perfect gentlemen, with the possible exception of Great Uncle George. But at dinner that night, Aunt Eloise so far forgot this fact as to stare unremittingly through her lorgnette at Whistle, even to the extent of leaving her dainty dinner almost untouched. And ever and anon she would shake her head and sigh, "Ah, indeed, poor brother George; what a marvelous resemblance!"

Now, if there was one thing more than another that Whistle could n't stand, it was to be stared at, and to-day especially, with the palling consciousness of that scratch

which seemed to be growing bigger and bigger by the minute. The first thing he did was to upset his glass of ice-water. We all know how it feels, or if we don't, we can guess, to have little ripples of ice-water drip-



ping down through a very thin pair of white trousers; and Whistle, seeking to clutch the trousers free from his shivering little legs, laid hold on the table cloth instead, and Mother's beautiful dinner-service began to indecorously topple and dance about.

"O Whistle, Whistle!" cried Mother.

## The Willises' Hired Girl 27

Then low and strangely sweet there sounded over the topsy-turvy table, on Aunt Eloise's outraged ears, a whistle. It was enough to have one's dinner rudely danced about before one, but to be whistled at, that was too much!

"Leave the table, sir," said Father sternly, and Whistle did with such joyful alacrity that Aunt Eloise found it exceedingly difficult to adjust her lorgnette to the little flying figure, and doubtless would not have succeeded had not Whistle stubbed one of his stubby toes and fallen flat. Then Aunt Eloise caught a glimpse of him. The next second a stupendous slamming of the door announced that Whistle had departed.

"And do you mean to say that you encourage the child in such vulgarity?" Aunt Eloise was curtly addressing Mother. "I think I distinctly heard you command him to whistle!"

"O Aunt Eloise, I beg you will not misjudge me. I—I—was simply addressing him—his—his *name* is Whistle!"

"*'His name is Whistle!'*" cried Aunt Eloise disdainfully. "His name is Ethelbert Romley Foster, after his paternal grandparent!"

"Yes, but—but, Aunt Eloise," broke in Father, "we had seemed to find Ethelbert rather an inappropriate name for the child, and I really don't know how it came about, but—" Here Mother interrupted: "I think it was Huldy who gave him the name of Whistle, dear. Yes, I am quite certain it was Huldy."

"You see," continued Father, "the little fellow has always been a really remarkable whistler. I think Huldy taught him to whistle, did she not, my dear? And so it came about, that because everybody was always asking him to whistle, he began to con-

sider 'Whistle' as his name, and Huldy thought it suited him so splendidly. So you see, Aunt Eloise, how the name has just evolved in a perfectly natural manner."

"Ah, indeed! Yes, I see. I scarcely would have thought, Julian, that you would have considered Whistle a proper name for your son; and the child evidently associates the name with the act of whistling, for he—whistled—at—the—table!"

"Oh," cried Mother, "I hope you will not condemn him for that. It's—it's his religion; at least, Huldy says it is."

"It's his religion!" fairly screamed Aunt Eloise. "Huldy named him Whistle, and Huldy says whistling is his religion. Who—is—Huldy?"

"Why, Huldy is—" stammered Mother; "why, Huldy is—" repeated Father—"Huldy is the Willises' hired girl."

It was only the force of habit. All the

children in the neighborhood spoke of Huldy as the "Willises' hired girl."

Aunt Eloise sank limply back in her chair, but only for a moment. Then she drew herself very erect, and each word rang out with superb distinctness: "I had scarcely thought to witness the day when you, Julian Foster, in whose early years I have had such pride, would see fit to leave the selection of the name and religion of your only son to the 'Willises' hired girl.' "

"My dear Aunt Eloise, in justice to your viewpoint, let me assure you that I do distinctly see, and for the first time, how ridiculous the situation would appear to one who had not learned to respect it." Aunt Eloise was about to force an interruption to the effect that respect for such a situation on her part would be far more absurdly impossible than the situation itself. But Father held his ground steadily and continued—

"You see, my dear Aunt, Whistle has been—well—rather an unusual child. This Huldy was his devoted nurse from babyhood. I think I may say that Huldy has been unique in never seeing anything but good in the child. She has always been able to govern him, when—well—it seemed perhaps a trifle difficult to gain his obedience. He, on the other hand, always has been exceedingly fond of her, which would, I dare say, follow as a matter of course. So you see, if Huldy was the one who named him Whistle, it came about in a wholly unpremeditated way. Don't you think so, Aunt Eloise?"

"It may have come about in a wholly unpremeditated way, but I can not say I favor the result," said Aunt Eloise icily. "But I believe, my dear niece, that you said whistling was his religion. Could any explanation cover so remarkable a statement?"



Father, noting a little quiver on Mother's lips, gallantly came to the rescue.

"You see, Aunt Eloise, it is like this—at least, we think it is like this—but truly we do not exactly know. Huldy has evidently taught the child to whistle when he is confronted by an embarrassing situation, or when he might perhaps otherwise be tempted to—er—cry, or be a bit irritable as children will. We do not in the least understand what idea the child may have back of the whistling. Do we, my dear?" He glanced at Mother for corroboration. "But we have hesitated to restrain an act which we have noted brought about such favorable results. We never were able to bring anything to bear upon the situation which seemed effective to a like degree. So you see, my dear aunt, that is why we call whistling his religion—merely in a jocular way, you understand. It has all come about very simply and naturally."

"I would not have deemed it possible that you could treat religion in a jocular way," replied Aunt Eloise sternly, "and surely to name whistling as a religion would seem to me not far removed from blasphemy."

Then Mother spoke with something of animosity in her bright eyes and much of courage and assurance in her voice: "Aunt Eloise, I am not able to say what Huldy's religion may be, nor what the motive power back of the whistle, but I do know that that clear, sweet whistle is bringing about a transformation in our little boy. I know that Huldy, whatever she may be, is like a cleansing ray of sunshine in his life. I regret that I was unable to keep her in my home, but you see, Whistle was too old for a real nurse, and Mrs. Willis, one of our neighbors, after a long and painful illness, was taken away from her three little tots two years ago last December. The father paid little heed to

them, and Huldy's kind heart yearned to help. So she went there to do all the house-work and take care of those three little children. It was a fearful undertaking, but Huldy has not faltered."

"Ah, I see!" said Aunt Eloise. "That is why she is the 'Willises' hired girl.' Ah, yes, I see!"

"All the children about here call her that, Aunt Eloise," broke in Father. "So, you see, it is quite natural to assume the habit, is it not?"

"I trust I shall be able to avoid these most simple and natural habits!" sighed Aunt Eloise disdainfully. After a few moments of painful silence, she asked, "Is this Huldy a person of education?"

"Well—er—not exactly," replied Father and then burst into a hearty laugh, which seemed to rather relieve the situation for everybody.

"No, scarcely would one call Huldy a person of education. She is perhaps—er—quite the reverse. But I am beginning to see that there is a culture of the heart, my dear aunt, which brings perhaps more real comfort to humanity than mere head culture; but this, I doubt not, would appear less true to you because you have not known Huldy."

"Doubtless," said Aunt Eloise weakly and turned to her forgotten dinner.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE WICKED-ACTING CHILD

**T**HE following morning when Whistle appeared in the cosy blue breakfast room, he knew the very instant he set foot within the door that something had happened—something even worse than the memory of the night before.

There stood Father and Mother and Aunt Eloise, all so silent, all gazing with fascinated, sorrowful intentness at something on the serving-table. The pained expressions of Mother's and Father's faces, and Aunt Eloise's triumphant air, quickly revealed the situation to Whistle's hurt little heart.

It was Great Uncle George's likeness! Yes, there it stood on the table in a poor little tarnished frame. Nobody even heard Whistle approach till he stood defiantly

## The Wicked-Acting Child 37

straight in front of the only picture extant of poor Uncle George.

It might have been taken at about the age of twelve, and it showed forth in a truly wonderful way all of Uncle George's real life colors. His hair—a very bright red—looked as if a persevering hand had sought to make it presentable for the occasion and had failed signally, for crisp wisps of coarse hair stood up here and there and the cowlick was past all hope. The little red face was just impossible to describe! The eyes were n't blue, and they were n't brown, and they were n't gray, and they were n't green; they were just to see out of. They were n't meant to be any color in particular, and they were n't larger than was necessary. The other features could n't be described any better than the eyes; they did n't seem to follow any line of recountable physiognomy. The only way you could ever have expected to know how

poor Uncle George looked was to see the little figure facing his likeness on that morning in the breakfast room. Even the awkward little hands were clasped in exactly the same fashion.

Whistle stood as one spellbound. The hot blood slowly suffused his face, and his little breast heaved painfully. Then, like a flash, a clenched fist came in contact with the likeness of Great Uncle George. The astonished beholders heard a crash which would have seemed out of all keeping with the dimensions of the poor time-worn frame, but which was truly to be accounted for by the force of the sturdy little arm, and still further, by the tumult in the throbbing little heart. Then Whistle turned furiously on Aunt Eloise.

"You're a pig," he screamed—"a pig—pig—pig!"

That was all, but it was quite enough.



*It was Great Uncle George's likeness!*






Silence—then the violent slamming of the door announced Whistle's departure.

Father stood with low bent head. His hand, which was grasping the serving-table was trembling noticeably, but both the humble posture and the trembling were to be accounted for by something new, something just awakened in Father's heart. Also, it was something new in Mother's heart that brought the sudden pallor to her cheeks and the welling of tears to her eyes. But in neither of their hearts was there the usual sense of condemnation for the child. Rather was it a strange new feeling of tenderness and regret, mingled with bitter reproach towards the stately aunt whom they knew was virtuously awaiting their apologies.

Aunt Eloise was tapping a satin-slipped foot louder and louder upon the polished floor in what she deemed righteous impatience. Then she burst forth:

"O, what a wicked-acting child! I hope, Julian, you will be forgiven for rearing your only son in such a painful manner." Aunt Eloise sighed hopelessly.

"My dear Aunt," said Father gently, struggling manfully against the reproach that would have surged to his lips, "I am grateful to you and to this episode, sad as it has been, for a better and more just viewpoint towards my little boy. I am not meaning to imply that the child was not grossly wrong in his outburst of anger; that goes without saying. But was the grievance not greater and more poignant than the outbreak? Put yourself in his place. If you had looked just like that picture of Great Uncle George, would you have relished being confronted with it and told that you did? Would you not have felt like doing just what Whistle has done? It comes to me now that during all his poor little life we



have been doing just what you have done. We have been confronting him with pathetic pictures of himself. We have had them enlarged and framed at every turn of the road. What else could he do but try to look just like them? Just see how naturally he fell into the very posture of Great Uncle George! And we have n't taken pains to confront him with any enlarged pleasing pictures of himself either; they have all been on the order of Great Uncle George."

Mother had stolen to Father's side, and was sobbing softly on his shoulder as he finished speaking.

"Again I say, I thank you, Aunt Eloise, for this experience. It has served as a wonderful awakening."

Aunt Eloise was absolutely limp with astonishment. She could not believe the evidence of her senses. The enormities of the previous evening were as nothing to this. To

have one's precious relic ruthlessly broken into a thousand bits in a fit of anger; to be called a pig, and then—to be thanked for the experience, as bringing about an enlarged viewpoint! It was altogether a condition beyond reason—beyond even resentment—beyond reply—beyond hope. Aunt Eloise just became limp and ceased to think. A delicious aroma of coffee greeted her nostrils.

"Come," she said weakly, "let us have our breakfast."

Father stooped and almost reverently picked up the shattered picture and a tiny folded bit of yellow paper which lay beside it, and shook them free from the debris.

"*Great* Uncle George," he said softly, and stealthily put them in his pocket.

CHAPTER IV  
FATHER MAKES GOOD

**W**HAT of Whistle? He was on the road to Huldy's. 'Scarcely distinguishable was he in the mighty cloud of dust his angry little feet were kicking up. There was only one thing to do at a time like this, and that was to go to Huldy. It was n't even necessary to stop to think, but just to go.

When he reached the Willises' familiar doorstep, he began to think. Thoughts came quick and fast—thoughts that, penetrating the anger, cut and hurt and wounded.

What would Huldy say? Huldy would ask him why he had n't whistled. Why had n't he? Because he had n't been *big* enough; that was why. He wished he could feel that Huldy would scold him, but he knew it was a hopeless wish. Huldy never

scolded. But already he could see the disappointed look in her kind eyes, and he writhed under it. Already he could feel the strong, soothing touch of Huldy's rough hand on his head, and already he could hear her say, "Never mind, darlin', it ain't a bit like ye, and ye'll never do nothin' like thet agin, *I* know!"

But he had disappointed her so many times. Would not the day come when she would cease to have such glowing trust in him? Whistle swallowed hard. To him, that would be the greatest calamity that could creep into his sad little life. Huldy's trust and Huldy's love—they were the only things in life worth having. This was the most horrible thing he had ever done. He had broken that hideous picture—ugh! He could n't bear to think of it! And he had called Aunt Eloise a pig four times. He remembered how Caleb Stout had called him

a pig just once and how *he* had felt. My! what a terrible walloping he had given Caleb Stout for calling him a pig that time—and only once. But four times! He could n't remember what he had done to arouse Caleb's anger, but he began to wonder if this thing that Aunt Eloise had done was really four times worse than the thing he had done to Caleb Stout.

Whistle heard the Willises' dishes clattering as they breakfasted. He was dreadfully hungry, for he had had no breakfast. He straightened courageously and approached the door: "I don't care for old Aunt Eloise, and I wish she'd go home; and I don't care for anything that Mother and Father can do to me, but Huldy—" He stopped and bit his trembling lips. "O, I wish I had n't called Aunt Eloise a pig four times," he sobbed.

Whistle slunk in on the familiar scene.



Everything was there, just as he had expected to find it, even to the look of understanding in Huldy's eyes the very instant she spied him. All the little Willises were talking at once, and Huldy was waiting on them all.

"Whistle, darlin', set right down," said Huldy joyously. "Hev ye had yer breakfast, or will ye hev a bite with the childurn?"

"I'm not hungry," quivered Whistle dishonestly.

Huldy understood. He knew she would. He had something that must be told. She deftly supplied the three hungry Willises with food enough to cover a few moments' absence, and threw a loving arm about Whistle, drawing him into another room.

"Wot's troublin' ye, lovey?" she said tenderly, sitting down and closely cuddling the freckled, tear-stained face.

"O, Huldy, Huldy, I did n't whistle, and

I did the awfulest thing," sobbed Whistle. Then it all came out in a burst of vehement and almost incoherent words, but the one who listened, heart to heart, understood—yes, understood every single word—and far, far more than the broken words expressed. Clearly, she saw the little pathetic figure in front of the hateful picture; saw the cruel triumph of the pompous aunt; saw what she had seen so many, many times before—the hurt pride and aloofness of the father and mother; but more than all, she saw straight into the little aching heart, and saw all the pity of its longing for just love.

Whistle was searching for the disappointed look in Huldy's eyes—searching through blinding tears; but it was n't there—it was n't there. She only said, "Pore 'little lamb!" and kissed him yearningly.

He thought she had n't understood. But he must make her understand!

"I called her a pig four times," he faltered; "*four* times, Huldy, do you hear?" But this time Huldy only answered absently, "Pore ole lonely soul!"

Whistle was mystified. Who was a poor old lonely soul? Surely that did n't apply to him, and it did n't sound like Huldy. Could she by any possibility be referring to Great Aunt Eloise? It seemed absurd that such could be the case, but who else could it be?

Huldy went on absently, "Pore ole lonely soul! She ain't never had anyone to really love, or to really love her. She probaly ain't never hed a single child friend. Ef she hed, she could n't never have done thet—thing." The blood mounted to Huldy's kind face. "So we must n't be a-hatin', but on'y pityin' and lovin'," added Huldy softly. "My little Whistle boy, yer Aunt Eloise needs ye fer her friend; she needs ye turrible.

She has probaly never hed a really friend, and that is why she does thin's that ain't kind. Jest think how ye kin help by bein' her really friend!"

"O, Huldry," sobbed the still more mystified Whistle, "you don't know Aunt Eloise. Why, she—she would n't have *me* for her really friend. She is big and grand, and—and she hates me because I look like Great Uncle George."

"Whistle, honey, do ye 'member thet big ole elm tree in yer back yard to home? Do ye 'member how a puny little storm come 'long, and blew it straight over, and broke the kitchen winders, and made a' awful mess?"

"Yes," said Whistle with interest, beginning to glimpse light.

"Well, it looked awful big and grand, too, but it was all holler and rotted out inside. Ye can't allus tell, Whistle, by the outside.

I feel sure yer Great Aunt Eloise's insides needs a lot o' love and kindness to keep her from fallin' down, too, and hurtin' someone."

Here a shrill demand for more breakfast sent Huldy in haste to the dining room.

"Now jest ye chirk right up, Whistle, lovey! Ain't ye got a great big splendid job afore ye? I allus knew my little sodjer boy would find a battle big 'nough to prove wot a sodjer he is! An' here it is waitin' fer him! Jest see that Great Aunt Eloise has one really truly friend. It ain't matterin' how hard work it is; ye jest go ahead and ye'll be a braver sodjer than the bravest man who fought in them trenches, 'cause they were on'y knockin' down other people, while ye'll be a-knockin' yerself down. They ain't no bigger battle than the battle over ourselves, lovey."

When a final emphatic squeeze had been

given, Huldy's quick perception noted a warlike straightening of the strong little form and a noticeable expansion of the full little chest, and she knew the battle well begun.

It seemed reasonable that a warrior should eat a fine breakfast, as a matter of preparedness. This Whistle did, with zest and with numerous side glances and comprehensive winks at Huldy.

The familiar toot of Father's car sounded just as Whistle was finishing, and it must be admitted that the heart of the new-born warrior gave a throb almost akin to fear. A base suggestion even counselled that he seek refuge under the Willises' dining table. But Huldy's bright assurance as she cried, "Why, here's yer paw, dearie! Ain't that nice?" quelled the cowardly intent, and Whistle rose to the occasion with rather questionable bravery.

"Go to the door, Whistle, an' ask yer paw

right in," smiled Huldy encouragingly. What else was there for a real soldier to do but obey his chief? And Whistle uncompromisingly obeyed.

O, day of wonders! He had expected to open the Willises' front door to a coldly disdainful father, who, while always courteous, could be terrifying through that very courtesy. But on this morning Father did n't look terrifying; he did n't even look courteous; he did n't look natural; he looked ashamed, and he looked apologetic.

Whistle and Father stood perfectly silent, gazing at each other in amazement. It was intensely amazing to Whistle that Father should look ashamed and apologetic after the awful sin which he, Whistle, had committed. Father, in turn, was surprised that Whistle should have come to greet him—that he should be standing straightly before him with real comprehensive interest in his ques-



*Whistle and Father stood perfectly silent, gazing at each other in amazement*



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tioning eyes, and this, too, at their first meeting since Great Aunt Eloise had been called a pig.

Father cleared his throat and acted strangely at a loss as to just how to begin. Whistle had no intention of beginning. His was only silent wonderment at problems too big for him to solve.

Then Father spoke: "My son," he said, with poorly restrained emotion, "of course I am sorry, very sorry, indeed, for the temper you displayed this morning towards your Great Aunt. I trust that such an outburst will not occur again, ahem; no—never again, sir! I had purposed to take you down-town with me this morning, ahem, to let you pick out the bicycle you have so long desired, and—ahem—you know that—ahem, I dislike having my plans turned aside by any untoward conditions. No, ahem, not even the sad circumstance of the morning shall hinder

me from carrying out my intention. Get your cap, my son, and come with me." Whistle's eyes had widened with astonishment until they looked like real eyes. Whistle's face took on the animation of real purpose.

"Sir," he said with manly decision, "I do not deserve the wheel. I will earn it by acting better, as you told me I must do."

"Surely, my son," said Father, his tone gaining emphasis, "you will not presume to thwart my purpose. Get your cap and come immediately."

"I have no cap, sir," said Whistle.

"Then borrow one of the Willises!" cried Father recklessly.

Whistle gave his father the first look of real admiration he had ever given him in his life.

"You're a trump!" he said, self-forgetfully.

A great many conflicting emotions surged in Father's breast as Whistle turned to the Willises' hall-tree and unceremoniously seized upon Hank Willis's plaid cap.

It was hard to let go of the old attitude of inflexible aloofness, but it was gratifying to hear himself called a trump and to be regarded by his son with unfeigned admiration. It was a delightful revelation to find that his son could be manly under certain circumstances, but—he must not appear too gratified or too lenient; he must not lose his self respect. Yes, Father's position was most unusual, to say the least. So was Whistle's. And so was Huldy's.

Jogging along by Father's side in the big car, Whistle did n't even attempt to solve the mystery. Here he was, in Hank Willis's cap, going down-town with a father wholly unknown to him to buy the much coveted wheel. And why—why? Because he had

done a frightful thing, that was why! But how could that be? Finally, he had to abandon his search for reasons, and only now and then did his thoughts go back to the matter.

Huldy, peeking out the window at the departing car, had a look of questioning intensity in her eyes. Why had Whistle taken Hank's cap? Because they were going downtown, that was why! But why were they going down-town and not home? Why had she heard no loud tirades, but only courteous expostulations and admonitions? Why had Whistle not run to her with flashing, tearful eyes, and thrown himself in her arms? Why, why, why, mused Huldy. The last why was so intense that it pulled itself into a deep scowl between Huldy's eyes. The scowl did n't belong to Huldy at all, and so it wakened her up very suddenly to the uselessness of her questionings.

"Wot's the use of whyin' anyhow?" rumi-

nated Huldy, out loud. "Wot's the use of specalatin' on evil when ye ain't even sure they's any to specalate on? This much I'm a-knowin' anyhow, thet all it's fer is to put a hull lot o' glory into good. So don't ye be faint-hearted, little Whistle boy, but jest keep a-marchin' on, fer there's a whole heap o' glory goin' into good from sech a big ole evil as this here Aunt Eloise trick."

Then Huldy gave herself a decided shake. "Huldy, I'm ashamed of ye," she whispered; "pickin' flaws and hatin' never yit helped no one. I reckon I'd better be a bit more lovin'." And none of the little Willises knew why Huldy whistled so unusually loud as an accompaniment to the clatter of the breakfast dishes.

Whistle and Father, meantime, were standing before great plate windows, through which they scanned the tempting array of shining bicycles. Over and over

again, Whistle's sturdy little legs had stood there, and often had his angry little heart cried out against the repeated refusals he had received in reply to his oft-repeated request that one of these beauties should be his very own.

"I could be good if I had one," his heart had often cried, "but I can't be good just to get one—I can't, I can't, I can't!"

The sight of the coveted treasures set Whistle thinking hard. He was living over the times he had stood there and hated everyone—everyone but Huldy. He saw clearly that he had no right to the bicycle yet. Had n't Huldy started him in a big battle—a battle which she said was really worthy of his strength? Would n't that bicycle tempt him away from the battlefield before him? How could he make Aunt Eloise his friend if that shining wheel was always luring him away? This was his first fray. Would he

let himself suffer defeat? Or would he do as Huldry would want him to do?

Whistle pulled himself very erect, snatched off the plaid cap, and stood there with superb determination in his flashing eyes. He looked fairly transformed. Father was turning toward him with the question, "Now, which one shall we have, my son?"

But the luminous gleam in Whistle's eyes and the warlike aspect of the little figure almost overwhelmed Father.

"How pleased he is! how transformed with the thought of possession!" he ruminated.

Oh, day of days! Can you picture Father's amazement when Whistle's voice, clear and strong and victorious, rang out, "I thank you very much, sir! I thank you *very* much! You are so very kind, sir, but I think if you don't mind, I'd really rather not have any wheel at all, sir!"



A moment more and Whistle was scurrying down the street, and Father was standing helplessly, shaking his head in mute wonderment and whispering softly, "Oh, why, why, why?"

CHAPTER V  
THE FAMILY RIDDLE

**T**HAT noon a scrubbed and combed Whistle stood with throbbing expectancy in the dining-room, awaiting the arrival of the family—especially Aunt Eloise. “Everything is different to-day,” he quavered, “perhaps she’ll be different too? Anyway,” he sighed regretfully, “*I’ve* got to be different, if I’m the soldier Huldy thinks I am.”

He stood gazing thoughtfully out of the broad window. Everything outside seemed distorted and strange. The sky looked a dull, stupid blue; the grand old trees seemed shadowy and gloomy; the bobbing red poppies were shoddy and limp; even the velvety grass looked coarse and harsh. Whistle sighed still more emphatically. “I guess

Huldy's right," he mused; "it ain't the way things really are that hurts a body; it's only the way you're looking at 'em. I guess I'll see things different when I'm fixed up some with Aunt Eloise. I'm glad I did n't get knocked out on that bike business. Gee, but that was some battle! My, but were n't they beauties, though! I do hope Father'll keep still about my refusing one, but he must have thought it a jolly queer thing on my part."

At that moment the door opened in a lady-like manner, and Aunt Eloise entered quite alone. She stood very erect and still when she saw Whistle, and her look was scathing to a degree that even he had never experienced before. Aunt Eloise did not speak. She only stood very still and looked. Whistle, too, stood very still, but he did not look. His eyes were cast down.

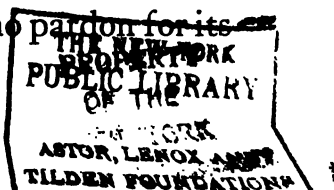
It seemed to Whistle fully an hour that they stood thus. As a matter of fact, it was

about two minutes. Then Aunt Eloise spoke, in a voice that was even more scathing than her looks. "Ethelbert, have you nothing whatever to say in apology for your conduct of this morning—your perfectly unpardonable conduct? Never in my life have I suffered such insult before."

Whistle drew a sigh of relief. Anything was better than silence.

"I—I am very sorry indeed, ma'am," he stammered, "but—Huldy says it don't go very far to just *say* you're sorry, or to make big promises, ma'am. She says it's better to be still and do something kind that's a whole lot bigger than the unkind. Then you get the unkind buried so deep you can't ever dig it up any more, and it just forgets itself."

The hot blood had mounted to Aunt Eloise's brow. "Huldy seems to be the only law-giver about here," she snapped—"quite an easy philosophy that asks no pardon for its



sins and just rests 'at ease until they're forgotten! But what could one expect from people that seem to rely solely upon the judgment of a vulgar person like this Huldy? A truly unbearable situation!" emphasized Aunt Eloise.

The look that had come into the little face before her made even Aunt Eloise's heart quake perceptibly. Whistle straightened stiffly, and every muscle of his body seemed pulled into a knot. His eyes flashed and one arm was lifted threateningly,—then something whispered: "They were on'y a-knockin' other people down, while you'll be a-knockin' yerself down."

The taut little arm fell limply, and a clear, sweet whistle fell upon Aunt Eloise's ears, like very balm. And why like very balm? It was, of course, outrageous to whistle in the presence of a lady, but was it not a choice between two evils? If the truth were known,



*His eyes flashed and one arm was lifted threateningly*

to create a pleasurable glow? Father and Mother did n't seem to understand at all!

The luncheon was a continuation of the riddle. Father and Mother were riddles to Whistle, and Whistle was a riddle to them; and as for Aunt Eloise, she was a riddle to herself, and all the household seemed a hopeless riddle to her. Father and Mother treated Aunt Eloise with such cool and scrupulous politeness that one felt something dire back of it. Whistle they treated with almost awed gentleness. Whistle, who had himself often experienced that direful thing back of this courtesy, felt strangely drawn to Aunt Eloise and kept casting shy, kindly glances upon her, and occasionally hazarded a remark to her which savored of unusual interest. His heart, too, was big with gratitude to his father for his silence on the subject of the rejected wheel. "Father's a trump to keep mum about that bike," he mused.

that menacing little figure had filled Aunt Eloise with horror. What was left of Great Uncle George after that sturdy clenched fist had struck him? Yes, Aunt Eloise was visibly relieved. The little figure had relaxed, and a smile struggled to Whistle's lips as he ruminated, "And she don't know Huldy either, and how could I expect her to 'preciate her when she don't know her?"


Just then the door opened again, and Father and Mother walked in, both looking a bit sheepish and a bit more belligerent as they sensed that Aunt Eloise was having her first meeting with their son since the affair of the morning.

But the attitude of both Aunt Eloise and Whistle was decidedly mystifying. Aunt Eloise looked rather more frightened than masterful, and Whistle's face glowed pleasurably. Had n't he just won another victory over himself, and was n't that enough



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After luncheon everybody seemed relieved and glad to go his own way, except Whistle, who, shyly and with evident embarrassment, went Aunt Eloise's way.

He followed close upon her as she sought her room, with a view to getting a few winks of sleep after her trying morning. So closely, indeed, did Whistle follow that just as she was swinging, in stately fashion, into the doorway of her room, he stepped firmly upon one of the fluffy black lace ruffles of her tea-gown and brought Aunt Eloise to a sudden and undignified standstill. She turned with ill-concealed anger: "You careless child!" she cried. "You are determined to make my stay here unbearable! Why are you following me about? Have you not done enough for one day? You are basely hypocritical, too,—treating me so courteously before your father and mother at luncheon, and now—now—" Aunt Eloise was actually melting

into tears. "Oh, you wicked child!" she ended sobbingly.

Whistle's heart thumped tortuously. Huldy was right. This battle with one's self was n't easy. Had n't he given up a bicycle—the thing he desired most of all—to win Aunt Eloise's friendship? Had n't he swallowed a whole lump of pride to follow Aunt Eloise to her room and force his friendship upon her? "I allus knew my little sodjer boy would find a battle big enough fer him, an' here it is,"—they were life-saving words. Huldy must n't be disappointed. Again, a clear loud whistle seemed to flood the room! It aroused all the remaining ire that Aunt Eloise was n't putting into use already. "Oh, you impolite, saucy child!" she screamed. "How dare you whistle in my presence? I am not even going to unpack my trunks—I can not remain in this house," she quavered—"although, since dear brother Albert is

abroad, I have—no—other—place—to go.”

Aunt Eloise had completely broken down and was crying in a most undignified way.

Whistle was always touched by tears—especially grown-up tears. Besides, he had whistled, and his heart was in the right place. Huldry had said that sometimes when things were the very worst, if one kissed a big unkind, it covered it up quicker than anything else. Whistle did n’t stop to think. If he had, he never could have done it. He just rushed up to Aunt Eloise and mixed up a very wet and vigorous kiss with the teardrops on her cheeks. Then, some way, he felt it was about all he could stand for that one day. A quivery something in his breast sent him flying down the stairs four at a time and on the road to the Willises.

“Gee!” he ruminated, “It ain’t going to be any soft job to make a friend of Aunt Eloise!”

## CHAPTER VI

### THE UNEXPECTED KISS

**O**NE could easily guess how Huldý felt when she heard all the experiences of her little warrior. The rejected bicycle and the kiss almost toppled her over, and possibly would have done so completely had she known that she herself was the object of the offense which the kiss covered. But this Whistle did not tell her. "Now, don't ye be a-feelin' that ye ain't succeeded, lovey," she said tenderly. "Givin' up thet wheel in a good cause wuz a hull lot better 'n havin' it, an', take my word, it'll bring ye more pleasure. An' thet kiss! Well, I bet thet ain't on Aunt Eloise's cheek at all, but clean down in her heart, makin' a nice soft place fer yer friendship to rest on. An' she'll be unpackin' of her trunk, too, and stayin' right

on, I know, fer thet kiss'll be a-holdin' of her there. My, what a joy she'll find it is to hev my Whistle boy fer her friend! It's a grand thin' to find a battle big 'nough fer us, lovey."

But when Huldy had heard how very kind-Father and Mother had been, all she said was: "Was n't I a'tellin' ye, Huldy, silly, thet this here was the kind a' thin' thet 'ud put a heap o' glory into good?"

As for Aunt Eloise, she sat right where she had dropped, on the very edge of the bed. She did n't seem to know that she was there. She had always thought sitting on a bed a reprehensible thing to do. She sat there a long time without moving or looking up. She did n't even wipe the fast-falling tears. She was feeling something wet and soft on her cheek.

Her eyes wandered tearfully to the pink carpet. In bold relief, the torn lace lay straggling there. It did n't seem to affect her at

all. She was thinking of that wet, soft, something on her cheek. She did n't remember ever having felt anything just like it before. To be sure, she had been kissed many



times—necessary and to-be-expected kisses that had n't seemed to have left much impression. But this kiss was n't necessary and it was n't expected. Unconsciously she wiped all around the spot where the kiss had fallen, but not the spot itself.


By and by the tears stopped falling, and Aunt Eloise sat quite erect. "Of course," she mused, "he's a bad boy—a very bad boy indeed! But there must be some good in him somewhere! And strange as it may seem, the child seems to have some very deep feeling for me, or he would n't have kissed me in just *that* way. No—not in just that way! Hard as it may sometimes seem, I think I am always able to see my duty. Perhaps I am the one to uplift the poor child and wean him away from his allegiance to this Huldry. If it is my duty, I shall be given strength for it," sighed Aunt Eloise. "So I may as well unpack my trunks and make up my mind to stay."

But instead, she sat down again to indulge a memory. It was of something wet and soft on her cheek. Huldry was right! That kiss was going straight down into Aunt Eloise's heart.



"I wonder what the child followed me up here for," she whispered. "I wonder where the poor little fellow has gone."

All the afternoon Aunt Eloise could n't seem to do anything but think. She never had a single thing in her possession that needed mending for a longer space of time than it took to mend it. But on this afternoon, the torn gown, which she had taken off hastily in order to don a negligée, lay right where she had flung it, carelessly, over the end of the bed. She had told her niece to pay no heed to her as she wished the afternoon to rest and unpack. But she did n't unpack, and she did n't mend the torn gown. She only lounged about and thought, and finally dropped into a sweet refreshing sleep, and dreamed that she felt a wet soft kiss on her cheek, and wakened with a smile. She could n't imagine why, but she quickly drew the smile into as anxious a droop as she could,



and sighed, "Well, well, if it is my duty, I will not shirk it; I will try to help the poor child. But what a painful task—what a painful task! I have been idling away too much time. I must unpack now, and mend that yard of torn lace." She glanced at the little time-piece cheerfully ticking away on the desk. It was a quarter to six o'clock! "Mercy me," cried Aunt Eloise, out loud. Never in her life had she been guilty of such idleness before, and she felt justly reproved by the busy little clock. Then she noted the tea gown flung over the bed. "I'll just have time to mend that lace and get myself in order for dinner," she sighed regretfully. "There must be something exceedingly strange about this house; I feel all topsyturvy."

She hastily picked up the tea gown and sought the torn ruffle. There was no tear to be found. It was all as neat and complete

as ever. Over and over again she scanned the ruffles. They were absolutely perfect. There was not a suggestion of a tear. Aunt Eloise dropped the gown limply to the floor. "I have been asleep a long time," she sighed. "I wonder if I dreamed that naughty child tore my ruffle? I wonder—if I dreamed he kissed me!"

There was a very decided tremor on Aunt Eloise's lips. Then a knock startled her. She opened a crack of the door to discover Whistle's stout little figure without.

"Aunt Eloise," said he hesitatingly, "I know I ought n't to a' come into your room like I did, but Huldy said she'd mend that lace I tore, and Huldy's a wonderful mender, and so I came and knocked soft and you did n't answer; then I stole in and got the dress, and had it mended and brought it back; and you never waked at all. I did n't mean to be a slinker, and I was afraid mebbe

you would get to wondering about it, so I came up to tell you how it was—that's all."

Aunt Eloise stood looking out the crack for a considerable while after Whistle had gone; a look of real joy was dawning in her face.

"Then I did not dream it," she whispered softly, "and—and—what if the kiss I dreamed about was not a dream at all? What if that naughty child took such a liberty with me while I was asleep? Well, well, if he did, I must be forgiving and not waver in my duty to him. But what a strange, impossible child," mused Aunt Eloise. "I wonder if he did?"

## CHAPTER VII

### A MATTER OF BOOT-BLACKING

SEVERAL days passed and the riddles continued. Father and Mother had some very earnest talks in the privacy of their own room, from which they invariably emerged more mystified than when they went in. For Father had told Mother several new things which he had observed about Whistle or about Aunt Eloise—several very extraordinary things indeed! And Mother, too, never failed to have her share of secrets to divulge.

“Barring the refusal of the wheel,” said Father at one of these interviews, “the strangest thing that has happened yet was this morning when I gave Whistle ten cents for candy or a soda, and afterwards met him and asked him what he’d purchased—

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just as a little matter of interest in the child's activities." Father flushed slightly here, for up to this time, it must be admitted that he had paid very little heed to Whistle's



activities, especially these minor ones. "Well, my dear, what do you think the child answered?"

"I can't imagine," said Mother mysteriously, her eyes widening.

"Well, he hemmed around a bit and said he had had his shoes shined with the money."

"No!" cried Mother incredulously.

"I tried to restrain a smile, and looked down at his broad boots which gave barely a hint of late grandeur. Whistle's face lengthened as he followed my gaze."

"Too bad, sir," he stammered regretfully, "but Eph Jones called me 'dude' and threw mud at me, and I—I finished him. Took the shine most all off, sir!"

"Did n't you tell him he must n't fight, Julian? Why, Eph Jones is twice his size; it's a wonder the child was n't hurt! But what a remarkable thing for Whistle to have done! To have used his treat-money to have his boots blacked! Of course you asked him how he came to do it?"

"That I did n't," said Father emphatically. "Something that Huldy said came to my mind," he added dreamily, "and Whistle

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and I talked about everything *but* boots on the way home. And bicycles, we did n't talk about them either. I overheard Huldy say to Whistle one day, when he was trying to extract a secret from Billy Willis,—‘Whistle, boy, don't ye know there ain't nothin' worth knowin' thet ye have to *squeeze* out of a body? All thet's really worth knowin' is jest what tells *itself* right out, straight from the shoulder, jest because it has to tell itself to ye, in partickler. Then ye've got somethin' thet's really yourn—somethin' ye can honor and respeck, and that makes ye feel like a man thet kin be trusted. Ye'll never git no pleasure out of no squeezed out secrets. Why, it's jest like a present,—ye would n't find no pleasure in givin' me somethin' fer Christmas if I come to ye and sez, sez I, “Whistle, I want ye to give me this er thet fer Christmas, and ef ye don't, I'll smash ye.” Ye'd jest say, convincin' like to yerself,



"It'll be a very cold day when I gives Huldy a present!" ' "

"What a wise person Huldy is," said Mother softly. "I wish I knew what it is that makes Huldy so wise and so different."

"Do you think it's Huldy that's back of all this change in Whistle?" asked Father.

"No—not entirely," answered Mother musingly. "I think Aunt Eloise has something to do with it, though I don't understand just how, for she seemed to dislike the child terribly from the moment she arrived. But he goes to her room religiously every single day, and sits there for a full hour. And Aunt Eloise looks like a resigned thunder-cloud, although she never orders him away. But the strange part is that she does n't really look like a resigned thunder-cloud; she looks as if she were trying to resign herself to *not* looking like one. I don't understand anything in this house of late,

but Whistle does seem to be developing these last few days since Aunt Eloise came."

"I think possibly, my dear," said Father softly, "that we're a bit accountable for this change in Whistle, too. Aunt Eloise may have acted as a kind of mirror in which we have seen our own shortcomings. I refer to that Great Uncle George episode, you know, my dear. I don't just understand how, but perhaps our manner towards Whistle is a trifle changed; perhaps our present attitude may be—enlarging his confidence a little. My dear," added Father softly, stealthily drawing something from his pocket, "I'd like a calmer judgment on this picture than we were able to give the other day. I don't see any very strong resemblance between Whistle and Great Uncle George, do you?"

Mother scanned the homely little features gingerly. "I see not the slightest resemblance," she said emphatically.

CHAPTER VIII  
POLITENESS INSIDE AND OUT

**F**OR Aunt Eloise, these last days were a constant puzzle. But the days and the people around her were not nearly the puzzle she was to herself. What was it that had suddenly entered into her life and made such a coward of her? Every day at precisely the hour that she did n't wish him to come she would hear that hesitating knock on her door. There Whistle would stand, his plain little face freshly scrubbed, and his coarse red hair shining with water, the overflow of which he constantly brushed away with the back of a freckled hand.

Aunt Eloise mentally vowed each day that when he came again at the wrong time, she would just politely but firmly tell him that she wished her privacy at that hour, and

for him to come at a more convenient season.

"Of course," sighed Aunt Eloise, "I shall not disregard my duty. I shall always make it convenient for him to be with me a certain length of time each day, as he has chosen to do. Strange how the child seems drawn to me! However, if I am the one to lift his ideals and turn him from this low influence which seems to hold him body and soul, I am willing to make the sacrifice!"

But each day at sight of Whistle's homely, appealing little face, she would just weakly open the door and admit him. And this was why Aunt Eloise was a puzzle to herself! Whistle would stumble bashfully in and sit down, with his sturdy legs sprawled widely on the floor before him. Sometimes they said almost nothing; there seemed nothing to say, but Aunt Eloise reasoned that even in the silence he was gaining atmospheric refinement. At such times Aunt Eloise did

bits of needlework, but always with an uneasy sense of the child's presence. She seemed strangely reticent, too, about re-



proving Whistle for his sprawling attitude and his ill manners, his vulgar language, shabby shoes and half-combed hair. The only thing she seemed capable of doing was

to look very forbiddingly at him, and even this seemed to call forth a considerable strain on her part. But it would never do to let the child think she really approved of him!

Only yesterday she had adroitly tried to give him a little lesson in forming regular habits of politeness. He had listened eagerly, but when she had finished, he had breathlessly told her that he was afraid the kind of politeness that must be practiced on the outside each day, until it became a habit, would come off,—that Huldy had said that the only kind of politeness that did n't come off, was from the inside.

If Whistle did n't arouse Aunt Eloise's ire to the degree that she felt he justly should, and to the degree that would have enabled her to reprove him in a just measure, there was no such lack as regards Huldy. The very mention of Huldy's name would fairly set Aunt Eloise's teeth on edge.

Was n't Huldy responsible for the entirely incomprehensible attitude of the whole family? Julian's unwarranted cruelty to her on the morning in the breakfast room, through much strained reviewing, she had come to attribute directly to something in Huldy's philosophy. Although she was unable to discover any possible connection between that episode and Huldy, she felt sure it was there. Huldy was everywhere—at least her philosophy was. But Whistle! he was the very saturate essence of Huldy! Here she had, with true kindness, sought to show Whistle that if each day he would spend that hour in her presence, forming habits of a correct sitting posture, leg posture, and mastering the terms of polite address, it would, through force of habit, become a part of his very self. Then he had made that utterly senseless remark about polite insides.

“What a perfectly ridiculous statement,”

she had retorted. "Any reasoning person knows that your insides can't be polite!"

Whistle had flushed angrily, and had told her a story that Huldy had told him, to verify the statement. Aunt Eloise had again seemed to lack the force to hinder him.

Huldy had known a man who was the very politest man she had ever seen. In fact, all the people in the town agreed that he was the very politest man in town. But one day a lady said something to him that hurt his pride, and he was n't used to it, and he got awful mad and swore at the lady, and called her names before a lot of people. "You see, Aunt Eloise," said Whistle, convincingly, "that was because he had only an outside politeness. Huldy says what he needed was an inside politeness that's down so awful deep it can't see or hear any insulting talks or looks. She says if you spell l-o-v-e and k-i-n-d, you'll be spelling 'polite.'



She says if the man had had that inside kind, he would n't a' heard the lady's insulting talk, and she would have felt sorry, and a lot of glory would have been put into good."

Aunt Eloise had n't really thought about the story at the time. She had been too justly angered, and she had taken the opportunity to reprove Whistle for his constant association with such an unlettered person as Huldy, assuring him that the effects of the intimacy would be difficult to wear away. Whistle had become very red and very angry, and then he had stopped short and bit his lips and had muttered that "polite insides could n't hear any insulting talk." And then he had whistled!

That everlasting Huldy philosophy! Aunt Eloise had become justly infuriated, and had commanded Whistle to *never* again indulge in that vulgar whistling in her presence. He had looked terribly cowed and sad,

and had thereafter sat through his hour without speaking. So had she.

Several times the suggestion had presented itself to her that he would not come at all to-day. That was why she had again found it difficult to refuse him admittance, even though he had come at a most inopportune time.

That was why Aunt Eloise felt even more helpless than ever, on this day, and a keener puzzle to herself. She had n't slept much, either, during the night. Over and over again, in the most inane way, she had kept constantly musing over the story of the polite man and the insulting lady, and the inside politeness that was spelled l-o-v-e or k-i-n-d, and was down so awful deep it could n't see or hear anything unkind or insulting. Of course, it amounted to absolutely nothing, only the child might perhaps not understand how justly she had been provoked, how earn-

estly she was seeking to lift his ideals. Of course, the conditions with the lady were quite different. She had insulted the man, doubtless without provocation. Huldy's philosophy was terribly lame, of course, in that these conditions of just provocation were not given a due place or explanation.

While musing thus, she fell asleep, and had a perfectly ridiculous dream about a great big *unkind* being covered up with a bigger *kind*, and the *unkind* getting buried so deep that it never could be found any more, and just forgetting itself. And then a whole lot of glory had gone into good, some way or other—and then she felt a wet, soft something on her cheek, and wakened with a smile.

Again she fell to musing, and the smile dropped into something very like a hopeless sigh. "I suppose Huldy is responsible for *that*, too," she said.

CHAPTER IX  
HULDY'S PARABLE

**T**HE day Aunt Eloise had told Whistle never again to whistle in her presence, he had felt especially happy because Bent White had promised him the use of his wheel, while he, Bent, took his music lesson. It was a very great concession on Bent's part, for none of the fellows ever loaned their wheels. However, Whistle felt the justice of it, for he had given Bent six jaw-breakers the day before, because Mother had told him he must n't eat any more candy for a week, and he had these on hand. When he silently left Aunt Eloise's room, however, on that day, he had forgotten all about the wheel. He was only sadly repeating, over and over again, Aunt Eloise's impossible demand never to whistle again in her presence.

"Why, it's in her presence that I've most 'specially got to whistle," grieved he, "but," brightening a trifle, "I've got so that I can stand her *looks* without whistling,—that partickler way she looks at me, because I'm like Great Uncle George. Mebbe I can get to stand it all, for Huldy'd be so pleased."

The thought of Huldy brought back Aunt Eloise's cruel attack upon her. "No, if she's going to slam Huldy, I'm going to smash her or whistle, one of the two. I can't stand it."

He was passing Bent White's house now, and the labored "thrum, thrum," of those everlasting five finger exercises fell on his ears. "Gee," he sighed, "how I've always pitied poor old Bent because he had to do those fool stunts! Sounds like a soft job now, up against Aunt Eloise." Then he thought of his hour's right to Bent's wheel. "Even that does n't seem much of a sparkle

to me now," he sighed. "Id ruther go to Huldy and get straightened up. She'll see some way out, I know. I can't just see giving up a job that Huldy says is just my size." The sturdy little figure straightened visibly as he turned in at the Willis gate.

Huldy had finished her work, and was laboriously writing a letter as he entered.

She regarded him joyously. It was a part of what Aunt Eloise would have called the Huldy philosophy to meet a problem joyously, and Huldy never failed to scent the approach of a problem. Her joyousness, also, was invariably in proportion to the extent of the problem. To-day Huldy looked extremely joyous!

"Where are the children?" said Whistle, inadvertently; for, at sight of Huldy, the painful thought had suggested itself to him that it would never do to explain to Huldy that Aunt Eloise was making attacks upon

her. He would n't hurt Huldy's feelings for the world! It was an embarrassing situation that he had n't had time to consider.



“Well, lovey, their paw took ’em out fer the afternoon, ’cause their Aunt Minnie wuz passin’ through today and stopped off a few hours. So we’ll jest have a nice, cosy talk; it’ll be a real comfort to me.”

Whistle instantly felt easy, and began to relate his recent experiences, the polite episode included. "I told her about your polite outside man, and it was awful clear to me, but Aunt Eloise did n't seem to see a thing in it, and—and—she raged around like a hyena—but I whistled!"

"I'm proud of ye!" cried Huldy. "My, but ain't I proud of my sodjer boy!"

"And then Aunt Eloise up and fairly snorted, and said I was n't ever to whistle in her presence again,—and it's just about the only presence I have to whistle in, since Father and Mother have been—kind of—different."

Huldy thought a few moments.

"Ain't ye got some pride workin' over time, Whistle boy, carin' so much wether she jest sees thin's yer way or not? Ain't ye just a bit sot 'bout makin' her see thin's yer way instid o' hern?"



Whistle flushed slightly. "But it ain't *my* way, Huldy; it's *your* way, and that's why it's the right way!"

Huldy patted him tenderly—"They's on'y one right way wether it's mine or yourn er Aunt Eloise's. Why, two times two is four, lovey, and it ain't a carin' ef the hull world says it's five or three or anythin' else; it's jest *four* till the end o' time! It ain't never two times two is four thet's got to set up nights a-worryin', but it's the other feller every time. He's got to worry 'round till he gits straight. He's the feller to pity. Right never deserves no sympathy. It never does no good to jest keep a-sayin' thin's over and over agin! If the other feller is sot on sayin' two times two is three, wot you've got to do is to prove it to 'im that it ain't. Words don't count aside of proofs. Jest ye prove to Aunt Eloise thet true politeness comes from the insides, and she'll respeck

your viewpint. I ain't sayin' but mebbe it'll be slow work, but I know it'll be sure."

Whistle had listened intently. "I'm just wondering, Huldy, how polite insides could make you lift up your legs and keep them 'zackly where they belong. I think my legs 'specially bother Aunt Eloise. I think mebbe it's because my shoes look shabby; I mean to try to fix 'em up a little," said Whistle, flushing slightly. "It 'll probaly help some, but my legs seem to be the things that make the most trouble."

"Thet's easy," cried Huldy. "It's on'y polite insides thet *kin* keep legs where they belong. Ef they 're a-sprawlin' on the floor, an' Aunt Eloise comes along careless like, an' don't see 'em, and stumbles over 'em and falls flat; thet don't spell k-i-n-d."

"Why, of course! O Huldy, you are always right! That's just why it's so fearful hard to have Aunt Eloise not believe it."

The light of understanding came into Huldy's face, mingled with inexpressible tenderness. "I might a' knowed it," she mused; "I'm afeared he can't git along without whistlin', if them are the condishuns he's facin'. Pore lamb, and I've bin blamin' him fer workin' his own pride overtime!"

Huldy was anxiously searching thought for a fitting "applecation" to help out this most impossible situation.

"S'pose," said she slowly, as if none too sure of her ground, "somebody's a-callin' on ye, and rings the door-bell, an' ye go to the door an' there stan's Miz Jones; an' ye smile, an' open the door an' say: 'Wy, Miz Jones, come right in; I'm happy to see ye.' P'r'aps ye wa'n't jest happy to see Miz Jones. P'r'aps ye wa'n't ready to see 'er.

"Now, thet there door bell wa'n't Miz Jones. It ain't a single thin' to do with 'er, more 'n to jest let ye know they wuz some-

body to let in. But s'pose Miz Jones sez, 'tomorrer mornin', 'tween nine and ten, I'll be a-comin' 'round to see ye.' Chances are, ye're all chirked up, waitin' 'round fer Miz Jones. It ain't even necessary fer her to ring the bell; yer probaly standin' on the porch ready to welcome her. Ten to one, yer gladder t' see 'er than ye wuz when she rung the bell an' ye did n't know she wuz comin'. It's kinder nice to be all rigged up and ready fer Miz Jones, ye know."

Whistle looked puzzled to an unusual degree. He privately prided himself on always seeing light before Huldy had accomplished her "applecation." This time it seemed opaque.

"Huldy, what are you getting at?" he interrupted. "I can't see what Miz Jones and the door bell have to do with me and with Aunt Eloise's telling me I can't whistle."

"Why, thet's jest as easy," cried Huldy,

gaining assurance. "Ye see, yer in yer Aunt Eloise's room, say, between two and three of a afternoon, ain't ye? P'r'aps somethin' comes along thet ye ain't expectin'—some-thin' thet gits up yer dander—and hate be-gins ranklin' round, an' then ye whistle 'cause ye wa' n't expectin' love, and love comes in and the ranklin' stops."

"I see, I see!" cried Whistle joyously. All the while I'm in Aunt Eloise's room I must be just expectin' something awful to happen that'll need to have a lot of love around, and then I'll just be ready to let love in every single minute, without whistling, just as I'd be ready to let Miz Jones in with-out her ringing the bell."

"O Whistle, Whistle!" said Huldy, sorrowfully, "can't ye see ye must n't be expectin' evil? Can't ye see thet every day when ye go to Aunt Eloise's room, you must jest be all chirked up, expectin' *love* to walk

in every single minute. Then ye 'd be all ready fer it, the way ye 'd be ready for Miz Jones ef ye knowed she wuz comin' an' ye would n't need no whistle. The whistle ain't the thin' that does the work, any more 'n the door-bell's Miz Jones."

"O Huldy, you 're just the most wonderful person," said Whistle, shame-facedly. "Mebbe I can get along without whistling if I remember Miz Jones."

"Course ye kin," answered Huldy hopefully.

"Who you writing to, Huldy?" asked Whistle interestedly, wakin' to the fact that he had taken a great part of Huldy's precious leisure time.

"I'm a-writin' to Lem Billin's," said Huldy, flushing slightly.

"O Huldy," cried Whistle rapturously, "if I try awful hard, do you think I can ever grow up to be a good man like Lem?"

And Whistle, some way, did n't seem to understand why Huldy hugged him so much harder than usual. He felt strangely embarrassed, and said good-bye almost shyly.

"I wonder what I said to get Huldy's goat like that," he mused as he trudged home. "But Huldy's so smart, she sees things when there ain't anything to see."

Huldy sat at the little desk, the blotched paper before her. The blotches were multiplying every moment, because of fast-falling tears.

"Do ye think, if I try awful hard, I kin ever grow up to be a good man like Lem?" she whispered over and over again.

"O Lem, Lem!" she sobbed. "Ye'll be a-forgivin' me fer not seein' that you're puttin' a hull lot o' glory into good. O Whistle boy, darlin', jest ye keep on lookin' at Lem that-a-way."

## CHAPTER X

### A LIKABLE PERSON

**I**F ONE always had had the good fortune to see Lem Billings at just the right times, one would have thought him a very likable person indeed. But the trouble lay in the fact that there were very many times that were not the right times to see Lem Billings. Huldry had seen him at all times. But Lem himself had taken scrupulous care that Whistle should see him only at the right times. In fact, Lem seemed to put a good deal of earnest effort into keeping Whistle's extraordinary estimate of him untarnished.

"Great kid, thet Whistle!" he had frequently ruminated. "Makes a feller feel like he *wuz* somebody. Howsoever, I think he's the gink that's a-standin' between me and my happiness. Mebbe if I can clean win 'im



over, he'll help me out a bit with Huldy."

It was this, perhaps more than any real spontaneous devotion, that made Whistle the recipient of so many valued favors from Lem. And the favors did the work, insofar that they exalted Lem to a remarkable degree in Whistle's estimation.

These last two years, however, since Huldy had left the Fosters and gone to the Willises, Lem had almost lost heart.

"I wuz bankin' on Whistle a-growin' up and not needin' Huldy no more, and her a-listenin' to me. But sence she has all them Willises to take care of, there's next to no hope, 'less old man Willis might be marryin' agin, an' I don't go much on that!"

Of late, Huldy had seemed to Lem to favor his amorous advances even less than usual, and as a result, Lem had resorted to the flowing bowl in an even greater measure than had been habitual with him, for love of

his cups was Lem's besetting sin. He had gladly accepted a job of roofing in a nearby town, "jest to show Huldy thet I kin ketch my breath without her." And, too, he cherished a rather forlorn hope that absence might lend a tinge of fondness to Huldy's hard heart.

Lem had been an orphan asylum graduate, and had n't a relative in the world, so far as he knew. Huldy had never been able to understand why her heart hardened so against him when he seemed to need her so sorely. Over and over again she had yearningly tried to see that things were just so bad with Lem that they could n't help putting glory into good, but she never *could* seem to get any farther than just to the bad things.

It is more than possible that Huldy's vision was thus defective through the very fear that she might see Lem from too glorified a viewpoint and act too hastily, for Huldy's

heart had a silly fashion of getting disagreeably tender when Lem appeared at his right times.

"They ain't no sech eyes as Lem's," Huldy would find herself musing too frequently,— "so dark an' soft an' kind! An' Lem's hair ain't bad, with them little curly-cews 'round his forehead when he gits a bit hot! An' Lem's smile makes ye happy clean to yer boots! His hands—my ain't they big and strong! and look as if they could do a heap o' kind jobs—but"—here Huldy would sigh softly and pursue another line of thought.

Lem had written one letter to Huldy since his departure. In fact, he had written it the very evening of the day he had left. But two weeks had passed, and Huldy had n't answered his letter. Lem was disconsolate. He had had a great deal too much to drink, but he had decided to go and get more, just to drown his sorrow.

"It's all up to Huldy," he had drowsily mused, in manly self-justification. "A'most lost my job yestidy, too, 'cause I wa'n't none too stidy. An' me thet they say is the best



workman in the bunch! Huldy has a lot to answer fer. Guess I'll go by the postoffice one more time, jest fer luck."

The postoffice was as far down-town as

Lem got that night. When he came out of the door, he looked quite transformed. In his breast pocket was a fat envelope. The several blots which had been deftly scratched off had only endeared it to Lem, and the laborious rendering of "Lem Billings, Esq.," had pulled him suddenly into the man he had n't been in many weeks.

In the quiet of his shabby little room, Lem reverently broke the seal. The first part of the letter was n't just what Lem would have wished. For Huldy, there was an unusual amount of emphatic advice. Then there were a multitude of blots, and the tone of the letter changed agreeably. In fact, the tone of the letter became such that Lem's heart throbbed foolishly.

At the very last Huldy wrote—"an' Whistle boy wuz jest in and found me a-writin' ye, an' he looked real dreamy-like and sez, sez he, 'Huldy, do ye think, if I tries awful

hard, I kin ever grow up to be a good man like Lem?"

Over and over again, Lem read these last words,—read them in wonderment at first, then read them to make sure they were really there, then read them through fast-falling tears, then kissed them and buried his face in them as he dropped down beside the tossed-up bed.

"O, God," he cried, "bless thet kid, and help me to be the kind of a feller he thinks I am."

And this was Lem Billings' very first prayer.

## CHAPTER XI

### THAT PURIFYING WHISTLE

**T**HE days went by—several of them—with only one very unusual episode, but that was very unusual indeed. Father's and Mother's rather bashful kindness to Whistle continued, and their very attitude seemed to make him feel and act more a man than ever before in his life. Father's and Mother's attitude towards Aunt Eloise had become daily less strained and more naturally courteous. Aunt Eloise had carefully guarded her speech ever since her nephew's attack upon her, and never in Father's or Mother's presence did she offer the slightest criticism of Whistle.

Whistle's daily visits to Aunt Eloise had continued uninterruptedly. There had been an occasional need for the "Miz Jones ap-

plecation," but Whistle had valiantly tried to be "expectin' love every single minute" and never to be expecting any trouble, and he had won out beyond his fondest hopes.

Several times he had gotten very red in the face, and once he had all but whistled before he could make his application. But, on the whole, he felt he was making strides in the right direction, and this brought strength for continuance in well-doing. However, it was still a bitter burden to him that the whistling was abolished.

He was cultivating enough of the politeness that was spelled k-i-n-d to keep his legs properly adjusted, and this effort was warming Aunt Eloise's heart to the degree that she had almost entirely discarded looking at Whistle as if he looked like Great Uncle George. His shoes, too, had been better kept of late, and his hair more thoroughly brushed.

The way that the unusual episode oc-



curred was this: When Aunt Eloise found that Whistle did not indulge in whistling again after she had commanded him to refrain, she, like many another who has won her end, suddenly developed an insane desire to hear him whistle. Although she would never have admitted it, even to herself, there was a weird fascination connected with that purifying whistle. To have the whistling reinstated involved a rather embarrassing situation for Aunt Eloise, and one which seemed to require a good deal of adjustment to render it even considerable.

"It is perfectly reasonable, I am sure," ruminated Aunt Eloise, "to have tried a new line of procedure and found it lacking—entirely unexpectedly. Whistling is wholly undesirable, of course, in the presence of ladies, but is it not a lesser evil? Is it not more to be desired than that apoplectic red? Of course, when the child is angered, he gets

a little red even when he whistles, but when he does not, the condition looks to me almost dangerous. The things I find it necessary to say, in this refining process, the things which seem to provoke the child's anger, must be said. Then, why not choose the less flagrant evil? What a pity, though, that he gets so uselessly stirred." The unusual episode occurred one day when Aunt Eloise was trying to find a plausible solution to this problem. Whistle entered with a look of determination in his face. He had been secretly harboring a burning curiosity as to the history of Great Uncle George ever since Aunt Eloise's arrival—the more as he had gathered from that first conversation on the subject that Father knew little or nothing of this unfortunate relative. As Father was usually very keen about his relatives, Whistle had naturally deduced something extremely mysterious about Great Uncle George. Aunt Eloise, he

knew, was the only one who could really be depended on to state the facts. It was a very painful subject indeed to broach, but Whistle had made his decision. He had had such a struggle with himself, as to the proper introduction of this tabooed subject, that he had entirely neglected expecting love to drop in most any moment.

As he entered Aunt Eloise's room, he noted that the trunk, which he knew contained family heirlooms, stood open. A strong odor of moth-balls permeated the atmosphere.

"Great!" exulted Whistle inwardly. "She's a slicker to have that trunk open today! I got a hunch of an easy way to resurrect Great Uncle George. The remains of that—ugh! picture 'll be in there."

Whistle sauntered nonchalantly in and sat down quite near the odorous heirloom trunk. He sniffed the air, and turned with studied lack of interest to the open trunk.

"What you got here, Aunt Eloise?" he idly questioned.

Aunt Eloise, who was a bit upset herself on the whistling question, was suddenly reminded of the fate of poor Uncle George's only likeness.

"You have not expressed any great respect, as yet, for family heirlooms, Ethelbert," answered Aunt Eloise icily. "I have not had the heart to guard even these treasures against the attacks of moths since poor Brother George's likeness is missing. There is absolutely nothing, now, to perpetuate his memory but one little note. And that is almost unreadable, through age and the fact that poor George was never over-zealous as a student."

Aunt Eloise's eyes had filled with tears.

Whistle refused to be intimidated by the tears. It was the psychological moment. He must strike while the iron was hot.

"Did—did—Great Uncle George pass away?" he questioned boldly.

"Oh, dear, no," sighed Aunt Eloise brokenly. "Death would have been so much easier to bear. Poor George ran away, and left only the little note I have mentioned. My mother had died shortly before this painful circumstance, and my father felt the disgrace very keenly. He called all of his children together and earnestly admonished us to avoid the low associates who had been George's downfall, and he charged us never again to mention George's name in his presence. The little note fell into my hands, and I have it somewhere in that trunk. I felt that if I ever needed the story of poor George to point a moral, the note would be an invaluable accompaniment." Aunt Eloise heaved a deep sigh, and dried her tears as she looked knowingly at Whistle. Whistle, on his part, had caught a suggestion which made

him extremely uncomfortable, but curiosity impelled him to pursue the subject.

“And—and—have you still got that note he wrote?” exclaimed Whistle, glancing towards the trunk. “Ah, yes!” said Aunt Eloise, approaching the trunk, and beginning to reverently turn its contents about. “I am going to show you the sad little letter, Ethelbert, for thereby I shall be using this painful circumstance to point a much-needed moral. This note, which I count a distinct disgrace to the culture and refinement of our family, I have never shown to my brothers. My respect for them was too great. I showed it alone to my father. His suffering at sight of its unlettered contents and poor penmanship was very keen. At first he seemed inclined to its immediate destruction, but on second thought (and my father never acted hastily), he pressed it into my hand and said, sadly and thoughtfully, that I would better

keep it,—that there might come a time, though he prayed to the contrary, when some member of the family might be benefited by this evidence of the degrading effect of low associates.”

Whistle, who had been thinking too deeply to heed these last remarks, burst out: “And did n’t your father ever try to find him at all? Why, mebbe he is still living!”

“Dear, no!” exclaimed Aunt Eloise. “He never instituted a single inquiry, and poor George is probably long since dead with the pain of his evil ways.” Aunt Eloise was searching through the trunk for the little note. She was pushing aside the treasured relics less and less reverently as her diligence increased. Whistle was thinking too deeply to note her at all. He was picturing the homely, hated little boy, who was doubtless treated with such cold disdain by his family that he had to seek comfort wherever it could

be found. He was thrilling with the pitiful injustice of it all.

"And *he* did n't have any splendid Huldy," he pitied. Then, in the intensity of his interest, he absently spoke out loud. "Would n't Huldy a' made that put a lot of glory into good! Would n't she a' had that poor boy sent for and brought back, all tender and lovin'-like, by his sorrowful family, and made them all live happy ever afterwards! Gee! that would have been pie meat for Huldy!" It was the last drop; Aunt Eloise lost all control of herself, and burst forth into a very vortex of imprecations upon Huldy.

"I'll find this disgraceful note and show it to you, and *then* you will perhaps see just what you are coming to if you continue to associate so intimately with this grossly ignorant, ill-mannered Huldy. Why, her very name shows just what she is! That type of



person is usually scheming and dishonest, too, and—and—do you know, you even assume the coarse *looks* of such persons through close association."



Aunt Eloise had poured forth these maledictions without so much as a glance at Whistle. If she had glanced at him, she would doubtless not have poured them forth, at least to that degree.

Poor little Whistle! He had n't been

expecting love to come in most any moment. Even if he had, I am not sure he could have withstood so severe a test. As it was, he was not equipped to resist the assault, even in the smallest measure.

All the time Aunt Eloise was speaking, he seemed to be inflating in a compound ratio until, when she ceased, his wrath had reached the bursting point.

"You're a low-down liar!" shrieked Whistle. "I could have stood your hashing me because I look like poor Uncle George, but—you—can't pick on Huldy. They're dirty lies!" he screamed, approaching Aunt Eloise threateningly; "all mean dirty lies!"

Aunt Eloise stood transfixed, as Whistle continued breathlessly: "Huldy ain't ignorant! She knows more in her little finger than you know in your whole body, and she's got the kind of manners that come from the insides, and she never calls people names or

speaks spiteful about 'em; and she never schemed nor lied in her whole life! Why, you would n't know what honesty was by the side of Huldy! I never thought anything about her name, but it sounds awful good to me—just like Huldy; and I wish to goodness I could be with her so much that I'd look just 'zackly like her, for she's just be-u-ti-ful! Her eyes—why, they're just like—like—” Whistle was getting beyond his depth; then he suddenly remembered a bunch of violets he had given Huldy one day, and how like her eyes he had thought they were “—violets!” he gasped, his voice softening. “And her cheeks are soft as—as peaches; and she's got great big dimples, and lovely little curls around her face, and she's always smiling, and kind, and good, and sweet, and *wonderful!*”

During this difficult description, Whistle had lost sight of the extent of his grievance,

and his manner had become less threatening. Aunt Eloise, who had been thoroughly frightened at the magnitude of the hornet's nest she had stirred up, seized upon this calmer moment to dissolve into tears.

"I—I had so hoped—that I might, through my friendship and interest, woo you from this Huldy," she quavered.

"Well — you've — got — a — plump — chance!" shrieked Whistle furiously, his anger returning with two-fold force.

Aunt Eloise had no refuge left, since tears had failed. She stood trembling and pale before that furious, war-like little figure,—then, one word struggled to her lips—a word which had been much in her thoughts of late.

"Whistle!" she cried, with agonized intentness—"Whistle!"

There was a long silence. Then, slowly the flush faded from Whistle's face—slowly his taut form relaxed—slowly the fire died

out of his eyes. Nothing in Aunt Eloise's life had ever struck a note more welcome or more sweet than the low, long, vibrating whistle which came from those quivering, obedient lips.

"O Huldy, Huldy! I did it for you—for you!" he sobbed, and before Aunt Eloise had cleared her vision, Whistle was gone.

CHAPTER XII  
WORKING THE APPLICATION

**W**HISTLE had shot down the stairs and out into the street like a flash. All the anger had gone with the whistle, but the open wound was left—bleeding—bleeding. He was walking thoughtlessly toward the Willises when he stopped suddenly.

“Gee!” he exclaimed. “I can’t go to Huldy with this! Why, I would n’t have her know it for anything! Here’s where I’m clean beat out. O Huldy, Huldy! You said this job was just my size, but it ain’t,—it’s a size too big for me. Got to face it alone now, too, and it looks like compound fractions did last winter—only worse.”

Then Whistle turned into a shady lane, and dropped down under a friendly tree. “Mebbe I can get a hunch what Huldy would

say if she knew," Whistle thought earnestly. "I'm not mad now—not a bit—but I'm not sorry either. I don't know what I said to Aunt Eloise—have n't even a sparkle! Worst is, I don't care! It was rather nice of her, though, to tell me to whistle, but I guess mebbe she did it because she was a bit shivery in her uprights. What a wonder Huldy is. She calls that whistle a street-cleaner—sweeps out all the dirt, and leaves a clean road to march in. Wish I could make one of Huldy's 'applecations.' Mebbe I can. It would help a heap and Huldy'd be so pleased."

Whistle lay silent, knitting his brows. Every few moments a memory of his sore grievance seemed to start the open wound afresh. Then, suddenly, he gave himself a vigorous shake. "Did n't I whistle, and ain't it a street-cleaner? And if I'd cleaned a street, would I be dashing around in the piles



*Then Whistle turned into a shady lane and dropped under  
a friendly tree*



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of dirt I'd gathered up, scattering it all about again? You bet I would n't! I'd be dumping it in some old dump-hole, leaving the street slick and clean. The dirtier the street was, the harder I'd a' had to work to get it clean. Then the more nut I'd be to scatter it around again!

"Huldy says the street-cleaning takes away everything except the good, helpful things that should be left—like the signs telling you to keep to the right, and the street names. I guess about all that's to be left after this cleaning is Huldy's whistle, and a kind spot for Aunt Eloise for telling me I could do it. The rest is all rubbish, and I'm a-going to dump it. Guess I'll try to keep to the right and mind the signs. Crickets!" exclaimed Whistle jubilantly, "if I have n't made an 'applecation.' It's up to me now to get it working."

Aunt Eloise sat perfectly still in front

of the topsy-turvy heirloom trunk. She knew she was alone long before she had looked to see. In all her life she had never been the complete enigma to herself that she was at that moment. The very instant that clear whistle had fallen on her ears, it had taken all the anger away, and now there was left only a dull, hopeless ache. "I wonder if he will ever come back again? I wonder if he will? I am almost sorry I spoke quite so violently—I really do not see that it is the child's fault that Huldy holds him with such tight reins. I suppose I should not blame him for coming under her strong influence; he—he says Huldy is a perfect lady—beautiful, too! That she is too polite and kind to speak any ill of anyone. How completely the child is deceived! I really wish I had not given way to my feelings. Whistle" (Aunt Eloise always called him by that name to herself, although she did n't know why) "Whistle

does not understand, and misjudges me. He even thinks me dishonorable and unkind!" Aunt Eloise winced visibly. "I—I wonder if he is too hurt to come again. I—I am quite used to his companionship now, and when one is used to a thing, one rather misses it. He had taken such a wonderful fancy to me, too! Why, I never have sought his friendship at all—he has sought me from the very first, and he has been growing more polite, too."

Aunt Eloise's bosom heaved strangely. There was something lying deep and sweet there. It was an unexpected, unsought kiss, upon which an unexpected, unsought friendship rested softly.

No, Aunt Eloise had n't quite realized it yet, but these two things were growing to be the very dearest things in her lonely life. Many people had seemed to be her friends, because they had had to, but this was so different.

"I—I wish I had been less hasty," sighed Aunt Eloise. "I wonder if the little fellow will ever—forgive—me. It's the most mystifying thing about that whistle—the way it seems to stop these violent outbursts of anger! I wonder what power a whistle could possibly have? I am under the impression that I asked him to whistle to-day, too. Perhaps, that will give him freedom to do it again, if necessity should demand; it seems to act so quickly, and is surely a great improvement on that apoplectic silence.

"Maybe a disagreeable experience was necessary to make the child understand that I have no objection to his whistling." Aunt Eloise flushed slightly here, and knit her brows earnestly. "I wonder if that is n't, perhaps, what Whistle means by 'putting glory into good!' Doubtless, Huldy has just heard the expression somewhere, but one *could* reason out of it that way.

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"I wish I could see this Huldy. I have thought for some time that it was almost essential that I see her and know definitely just the extent of this problem. At all events, I must try to control myself better in the future. I wonder," mused Aunt Eloise shyly, "if I could learn to whistle? There is absolutely nothing in it, of course, but it would divert me until I could regain my control."

Thus, in a small way, Aunt Eloise, too, was beginning to make "applecations."

## CHAPTER XIII

### PREPARING FOR THE PICNIC

**F**ATHER and Mother scented something unusual at dinner that night—something strained and uncomfortable. Mother had heard loud talking in Aunt Eloise's room in the early afternoon, and Aunt Eloise had refused to go motoring later—an omen of grave import, as she usually found her greatest pleasure in motoring. Then, too, Mother had had Aunt Eloise's favorite dessert for dinner, and she had not even touched it. But the strangest thing of all—the thing Mother was fairly bursting for an opportunity to tell Father—was that she, Mother, had observed Aunt Eloise sitting in her room with a very determined expression on her face, and her mouth all twisted up—trying to whistle! “Things have

just gone mad," mused Mother. "I think I'll be satisfied to just be a spectator, else I may become affected, too." But deep in Mother's heart was the assurance that both Father and herself were more than spectators in this unusual drama. Had n't Father, of late, been quite zealous about attending the boys' ball games, which he never even used to know were occurring, and had n't he come home excitedly from several games, only to spend the evening out in the alley trying to teach Whistle not to flunk on a curved ball? Had n't she gotten up several picnic lunches of late, entirely unsolicited, and had n't she put into the baskets lots of happy thoughts about how pleased the children would be when Whistle opened those baskets to find such special treats? She could n't recall having packed any baskets before for Whistle. Yes, she and Father were surely more than spectators!



To-night, too, Aunt Eloise had three times turned to their son and, in a shy manner that was nothing like her usual self, addressed him as *Whistle!* Always before she had called him "Ethelbert." Aunt Eloise had pronounced the word painfully and slowly, as though she particularly wished it to be noticeable that she was calling him *Whistle*. Father had looked at Mother and winked knowingly. Whistle himself had looked up amazedly; then his eyes had dropped shyly, but he had seemed wonderfully pleased and touched.

In the evening Aunt Eloise had pleaded a headache, and had gone to her room.

When Mother told Father about Aunt Eloise's trying to whistle, he had dropped into a chair all in a heap, and said: "Gee whillicums!" and Father never used slang. "There is no question about it—things are just going mad!" mused Mother.

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The following afternoon Whistle did not appear in Aunt Eloise's room. Three o'clock struck—four—five—and he had not come. Aunt Eloise had n't been out of her room all the afternoon, she had even refused to ride again for fear that Whistle might come in her absence.

"I'm getting to be extremely slothful and good-for-nothing. I don't even know but I feel a little sick," sighed Aunt Eloise. At five o'clock, however, she seemed to lose all hope, and feeling in need of companionship, she hastily dressed herself for dinner and went downstairs. Mother was sitting on the shady porch, looking very sweet and fluffy in pink organdy.

"Why, Aunt Eloise, are you ill?" cried Mother anxiously.

"I guess I do not feel quite myself," replied Aunt Eloise painfully. "Where—where is Whistle to-day?"

"Oh, you know to-morrow is the great day—the day of the picnic! Huldy gives a picnic every year and takes about twenty-five children, and they have the most wonderful time! Whistle has gone over to help Huldy to-day; he will not even be home for dinner. You see, the children's parents send in loaves of bread, butter, meats, and numerous other donations; but Huldy always makes the sandwiches and does all the really fussy work. I don't regard it as just fair that Huldy should have so much to do," said Mother flushing, "when she goes with them and entertains them all day. I'm sending Joel over to give this parcel to Huldy, and to tell her that I'll have our baskets all ready, with everything prepared, bright and early to-morrow morning,—also that Julian has engaged several cars to take them all to the picnic and back. Huldy will be so pleased," said Mother delightedly.

"Does Huldy ever come over here?" asked Aunt Eloise, with increasing interest.

"Oh, dear, no!" laughed Mother. "Huldy never has any time. She always comes, however, when Whistle is ill, or when anything happens which makes her feel she is really needed."

Aunt Eloise began to idly cogitate over the possibility (remote, she was obliged to admit to herself) of the robust Whistle ever getting ill enough for Huldy to have to come. "But I must see Huldy!" Aunt Eloise was mentally and emphatically declaring. Then a bright thought presented itself.

"Did n't you say you were sending Joel over with that message?" she asked with interest.

"Yes, and that little parcel on the table, a new tie for Huldy to wear to the picnic," answered Mother happily.

"Do you know, Gertrude," said Aunt

Eloise, sighing, "I am sadly in need of a little exercise. I'll just walk over to the Willis with the message and the parcel; where do they live?"

"Oh, Aunt Eloise! You are too ill to go, and Joel will be here soon."

"My dear Gertrude, my great need is sufficient exercise. You will be doing me a real favor by letting me go."

Thus it was that Aunt Eloise won the day and found herself on the way to the brown house with white trimmings, on the other side of the street, in the next block. Aunt Eloise's heart beat disagreeably fast, and the little parcel in her hand was held with such tightness that one might have attached a fabulous value to it, had one not been aware of the suppressed excitement back of the tightened grasp.

When she finally gained the Willis steps and began to ascend them, Aunt Eloise felt

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positively faint. She noted children's voices inside, raised in excited tones. Aunt Eloise walked around the porch, just to get a better hold on herself before ringing the bell.



There was a side door and a large open window, and between them a cosy bench-rocker. Aunt Eloise dropped helplessly into it. "I'm a trifle weak, I fear. I will just rest a moment before ringing the bell. They

are all so occupied and so noisy, they will not have observed me."

"I don't want to help to-day,—I'm too hot and tired!" cried a petulant voice.

"Nor I neither!" cried another.

"Well, I don't want to, and what's more, I ain't going to," cried another.

"Marthy Louise, honey, come here a minute, and jest ye look in this 'ere box and see wot a lot o' lovely sandwiches we got ready, 'cause we all worked together. Ef we all'll work willin' like, I kin git the table cleared to git supper, an' Whistle's goin' to stay, an' we'll hev a great time!"

There was not the smallest sense of irritation in the voice; it was gentle and sweet and soothing. It was a heart voice. It fell on the ears of the listener without like a revelation. Never in all her life had she heard a voice with such tenderness in its tones.

"That's Huldy," she whispered trem-

blingly, holding on to the arms of the rocker as if fearful of falling.

"I'll not make another one!" screamed Martha Louise forcefully. "There ain't any reason why all those children can't make their own sandwiches," cried Billy. "I'm done with it, too!"

"Billy," broke in the sweet voice pleadingly, "do you 'member wot a heap o' pleasure ye got ouden thet there loaf o' gingerbread ye helped me make t' other day? Ye seeded all them raisins fer me, an' they're so tegious to seed, an' ye beat it all up fer me, light 's a feather!"

"Gee! but that was slick gingerbread!" said Billy, reminiscently.

"Billy, dearie, thet *wuz* the best gingerbread we ever hed, 'cause we made it together; an' it tasted o' all the kindness and helpfulness ye put in it. We'll all be wantin' lots o' sandwiches to eat tomorrer



under them big old trees by the little krick, an' we want 'em to taste all juicy and rich with willin'ness an' kindness, too. And jest think how full o' gratytude an' good-will all them childurn'll feel when they know how ye all and Whistle done this fer 'em!

"Marthy Louise, ye jest run out to the 'frigerater an' bring in thet big pitcher o' leminade I made fer my sodjers. Thet'll brighten ye up an' make ye feel all fresh like. Oh, children," continued Huldy, joyously, as Martha Louise scurried off on her delightful errand, "wot we've bin a-sayin' reminds me of a story thet I jest made up one night when it seemed to me I wa'n't no good to nobody an' everybody wuz doin' everythin' fer me. It wuz just before I left Whistle's house." (Huldy did not add that it was when she was trying to gain strength to undertake the responsibility at the Willises.) "It's jest awful to feel ye ain't no good to nobody, an' I jest

hed to wake myself up with a awful panted applection. So I made the little ole man in the story jest as mean an' as good fer nothin' as ever I could.

"Wile we all work, I'll be a-tellin' the story. Marthy Louise, you git some glasses an' pour the leminade, an' I'll be cuttin' bread wile ye drink, and then we'll all git busy agin, an' I'll tell the story."

"No, sir-ee, Huldy, you don't put that over on us! If you don't drink a glass of lemonade, too, I'll not take any either," cried Whistle.

"Nor I"—"nor I"—"nor I"—echoed the three Willises.

"All right!" cried Huldy merrily, "but yer all a-spilin' me somethin' turrible."

Aunt Eloise heard not a dissenting murmur as Martha Louise collected the glasses and Huldy said softly, "Now, Whistle, ye cut a'wile; an' Hank, he'll butter; an'

Marthy Louise'll put in the meat; an' Billy'll put on the mustard and salt, all even like; an' I'll be a-cuttin' more meat and gitten the sandwiches we've made a'ready all packed up in damp napkins, so they'll keep 's fresh as a daizy till mornin'. Then, we'll have everythin' done and kin git a early start." As Martha Louise returned, Huldy began her story—

CHAPTER XIV  
THE STORY HULDY TOLD

“ONCT on a time, they wuz a little ole man who had never done anythin’ in all his life thet he could ’a helped doin’—on’y the pleasant thin’s. He allus done *them* with a zest! He would n’t fell a tree; an’ he would n’t saw; an’ he would n’t carry wood; an’ he would n’t build; an’ he would n’t plant; an’ he would n’t reap, but he did mighty much enjoy the good thin’s thet come from fellin’, an’ sawin’, an’ car-ryin’, an’ buildin’, an’ plantin’, an’ reapin’.

“He did n’t go without them good thin’s neither. He whined till he got ’em. But they wuz one thin’ he *did n’t* git, and thet wuz—good-will. An’ after all, it wuz the on’y thin’ he needed. But the little ole man did n’t know this. He hed never hed it in

his life, an' he did n't know how much it wuz worth.

"One day there come journeyin' through the village where the little ole man lived, three men with camels a-carryin' sech big burdens that the three men had ter walk themselves. They wuz good kind men who would n't overload their beasts, an' they even toted burdens themselves as they trudged along their way. They seen how the little ole man set round lazy-like wile the other people in the village wuz at work.

"These three men were all very wise indeed, an' right quick they seen that the little ole man wuz lazy and good fer nothin'—also they seen the glances of ill-will the other people all give 'im.

" 'This here's a sad condishun,' sez one wise man softly to the other wise men; 'thet pore little man is unhappy and wretched,—so much so that he ain't even found it out

fer himself! What he needs more 'n anythin' in all the world is good-will; but thet he must earn fer hisself. Let us ask him to go with us an' help us tote our precious burdens.' 'Yes, yes, let us give 'im a chanct,' said the other two at the same time.

"So, the first wise man thet spoke come up to the little ole man and bowed rale per-lite and sez, sez he: 'Sir, as ye ain't doin' nothin', won't ye jine us on a wonderful journey, an' help us take these here precious gifts to a great Prince?'

" 'Where does yer great Prince live?' sez the little ole man, 'and wot'll ye git fer car-ryin' these 'ere heavy burdens to 'im?'

" 'He is a Prince of Good-will, an' thet's a Prince of Peace. We are a-journeyin' to git thet priceless persession, an' to lay these 'ere gifts at his feet. Our great Prince is a-layin' in a manger,' sez the wise men.

" 'Bah!' cried the little ole man and

laughed rale mean-like. 'Wot do I want o' more good-will then I hev? Ain't I 'nough, so thet I am the on'y man in this 'ere village wot does n't hev ter work? All these people gives me all I need to wear and to eat, an' I hev a house to live in thet my father left me; wot would I be a-wantin' of more nor this?'

" 'My little man,' sez one of the wise men, gentle-like, 'it is very easy to see thet wot these 'ere laborers do fer ye ain't done thro' good-will but thro' force, an' force ain't good-will but ill-will. Ye ain't wise enough to see thet all in the world ye need is good-will.'

" 'I knows wot I need better nor you do, an' I'll go on no sech silly errand nor give up a life of ease an' plenty fer such a tiresome-like journey!' sez the little ole man.

"Jest here, someone come up to the little ole man with a very smart lookin' letter, which he handed 'im with the same look o'

hate on his face thet all the others hed on their faces. The little ole man grabbed up the letter with a heap o' interest. Thet he should git a letter wuz a most onusual thin'. No one had ever thought 'nough o' him to write him a letter afore. He wuz quite excited-like as he broke open the letter an' seen wot wuz inside. It seems thet letter come from one of them law men, an' it sed thet some kin o' the little ole man hed died and left the little ole man some very rich perses-sions. The little ole man held the smart lookin' letter up high an' cried out, 'Hooray! This is jest the kind of thin' thet pleases me. I should say I would n't be carryin' heavy burdens fer a prince who would give me on'y good-will and who wuz born in a manger, wen I kin git grand belongin's fer a-doin' nothin' at all!'

"The little ole man wuz thet excited an' he talked so awful loud thet all the people



come around to see what wuz a-goin' on.

"The little ole man cried out in a commandin' voice and sez, sez he: 'Here, you, bring me the best clothes ye got, an' money an' food 'nough to take me on a long journey; fer I have come into big belongin's, an' all I need to do is to go and git 'em and live easy ever afterward!'

" 'Bah!' cried all the people, jest like the little ole man sed it, an' all the hate they had bin a-feelin' fer 'im come out rale free-like. The three wise men bein' there, too, seemed to give 'em more courage.

" 'Ye may go jest where ye please, and stay as long as ye like, but we'll do no more fer ye; we'll give ye no more food nor clothin', and we'll give ye not one cent to take this 'ere journey. We hev all jest bin a-sayin' thet we'll never give ye another morsel to eat ef ye starve to death—much less a-fittin' ye out fer a long journey!'

"Then they all laughed rale mean-like at the surprised look in the little ole man's face.

" 'Where is yer big belongin's?' says one of the wise men, rale kind-like.

"The little ole man said some place way fer off, in a skeered voice.

" 'We're a-goin' thet same way, on'y ye goes yit further. Ye see, we've bin a-tellin' ye thet all ye needed wuz good-will, but ye would 'nt believe us. Now, because ye ain't got it, it's a-goin' to keep ye from yer rich persessions,' says one of the wise men, convincin'-like. 'Ef ye wish to be journeyin' with us, round by the way of our Prince, an' help us to carry our gifts, ye may still git to yer rich belongin's.'

"The little ole man tried coaxin' and arguin' with the village people, but they on'y made more fun of 'im than ever.

" 'Well, well,' cried he, at last, 'I s'pose

I'll hev to go with ye three men on yer travels, sence there ain't no other way to git to my belongin's.'

" 'Ye will hev nothin' to eat and nothin' to wear, less ye'll be a-carryin' yer share of the burdens,' sez a wise man in the same kind voice.

" 'Bah!' sez the little ole man, an' made a very bad face. 'Well, well, let us be a-startin' on our journey, sence there ain't no other way.'

" 'My little man,' sez one of the wise men, 'we will start when we git ready and not at yer say-so! Ye'll be goin' with us as a servant an' not as no master. Fer, after all, good-will is the on'y thin' thet truly kin make a master.'

"The little ole man was bitin' his lips in fury, an' all the people screamed with joy.

"Them three wise men did n't git ready to start till the followin' day, an' by thet time,



*"While we all work, I'll be a-tellin' the story," said Huldah*

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the little ole man wuz turrible hungry. He wuz awful faint, too, and clean fagged out, fer the people hed taken away his house, an' he had n't no place to sleep.

"He wuz beginnin' to see thet them three wise men wuz right—thet probaly goodwill *wuz* a pretty good thin' to hev. So he felt he would like to stop long 'nough with this Prince to git a fair supply from 'im.

"He felt onequal to standin' when the wise men sez as how they wuz ready to start. They strapped somethin' on his shoulders, wot seemed to the little ole man a fearful heavy burden. But it wa'n't but a very light one. But, ye see, the little ole man wa'n't ust to no burdens at all, and 'sides, he wuz weak and weary-like.

"But he did n't say nothin'. On t' other hand, he pulled up his stooped shoulders and put on a awful bold face.

"The people all hoorayed with joy as they

seen 'im start off. 'Good riddance,' they cried. 'Hooray, hooray!' We hope ye'll never git to yer rich belongin's.'

"Somethin' in the little ole man's heart hurt awful bad. Somethin' very like a tear come a-rollin' down the little ole man's wrinkled face. He felt very onusual-like. He cried out sorrerfully, without even knowin' thet he wuz a-cryin' out, 'I am very thankful to ye all fer the kind thin's ye hev done fer me! I'm a-goin' to try to do some-thin' fer ye all sometime!'

"Then all the people, a-thinkin' him to be on'y actin', screamed out more 'n ever.

"The little ole man's heart wuz jest a-bleedin' fer one look o' good-will. But he had n't earned it, an' so he did n't git it.

"As soon as they wuz well started on their way, they stopped an' give the little ole man a good meal. He on'y gazed on 'em in surprise.

“ ‘But I ain’t earned this ’ere food,’ sez he, sadly, ‘an’ I wa’n’t to hev nothin’ as I ain’t earned. I ain’t toted this here burden on’y a very short distance as yit.’

“ ‘Well, but ye jest dropped a burden,’ sez one of the wise men, rale pleasant-like, ‘an’ when a burden is dropped by any one of us, it lifts the burden fer us all.’

“The little ole man stood stock still, too amazed-like to walk. To be sure, the bundle thet wuz on his shoulder seemed lighter than it did, but he knew it wuz there jest the same. How could he have dropped his bundle an’ still be a-carryin’ it? He could n’t seem to git the problem figgered out.

“ ‘Ye see,’ sez one of the wise men, ‘ye jest dropped a burden of ingratytude thet ye’ve been a-carryin’ ’round most all yer life. Ye’ve bin holdin’ on to it so tight thet it jest could n’t git loosened up ’nough to drop. Cause ye ain’t put no value on good-will, ye



hev carried this 'ere burden with ye everywhere's ye've gone. Don't ye see how quick it dropped when ye up an' let go o' it? and don't ye see how much easier it is to tote a burden 'round with yer body when ye drops one off yer mind? Every burden any of us drops off our mind,' continued the wise man, 'lightens up the burden fer us all, an' is deservin' of a reward. So we will wait fer ye wile ye hev a good meal.'

"The little ole man on'y caught at the truth of wot the wise men said, but he know'd thet never in all his life hed he enjoyed a meal like thet one.

"I dunno wether he even guessed it wuz 'cause it wuz the on'y meal he hed ever really earned; but the wise men wuz on to thet.

"When the little ole man had et his meal, he rose an' stood up rale straight an' cried out, cheery-like: 'I feel so strong an' well, I would like to be carryin' a heavier burden

than this. I would like to be a-doin' somethin' to help ye more.'

" 'He has jest drapped another burden yit,' sez one of the wise men, joyful-like. 'This time he has drapped the burden of laziness. He's bin a-carryin' it 'round so long 'cause he ain't put no value on good-will, an' now, thro' his drappin' it, the rest o' us hev got rid of a very heavy burden indeed.'

" 'They strapped a bigger burden still on the little ole man's shoulders, 'cause he ast 'em to. But it seemed to the little ole man as light as a feather. .

" 'I'm so glad,' cried he, 'oh, so glad, thet I'm helpin' to make the burdens lighter fer the rest o' ye. I ain't never bin so full o' joy in my life.'

" 'Mercy me, ef he ain't drapped another burden!' cried one of the wise men. 'This is the burden o' complainin'. How he has bin

a-stickin' to this, 'cause he did n't know how much good-will wuz worth. His drappin' this will lighten up the burdens fer us all awful much.'

"So they all went on their way singin' and laughin', rale joyous-like. An' all the time the little ole man kep askin' fer bigger burdens to carry, an' allus they seemed lighter 'n lighter.

"Thet night, when the time come fer 'em to lay down to rest, the little ole man wuz happier than he had ever bin in all his life.

"It come suddenly to 'im thet it would be a fine thin' fer one of 'em to be a-watchin' wile the others slept, so 's thet no evil might come upon 'em sudden-like. So he up an' offered to stay awake and watch wile the others wuz a-sleepin'.

" 'I declare, ef he ain't dropped another burden yit!' cried one of the wise men, 'and this is the burden of slothfulness. An' it's

sech a relief to us all to be a-losin' o' it, and draps so much weight off'n our shoulders, I'm a-thinkin' as we kin continue on through the night an' git to our Great Prince quicker. I ain't a feelin' no need fer rest.' 'Nor I!' 'Nor I neither!' cried the other two wise men. "Sides, it's sech a be-u-ti-ful night, it's 'most light as day.'

" 'Why, our little friend 'ere has drapped off so many weights, he's even lightened up the night!' cried another.

"Jest then, one of 'em looked up in the glorious sky, an' he seen right straight over their heads a shinin', twinklin' star.

" 'Look up!' sez he, surprised-like. An' they all looked up an' seen the wonderful star. They all took off their hats and stood surprised and reverent-like, a-gazin' at it.

" 'Thet ain't no ordnery star,' sez one wise man; 'thet star 's got somethin' special on its mind.'

"Jest as he wuz speakin', the star began slowly to move an' twinkle at 'em wonderful, as ef it wuz a-beckonin'.

" 'Come!' says one of 'em. 'Let's be a-fol-lowin' it, fer I'm thinkin' it'll be leadin' us to our Great Prince, 'cause we wa'n't a-knowin' jest 'zackly where to find 'im.'

" 'That's jest right!' cried the other wise men, awful pleased-like. But the little ole man wuz the most pleased of 'em all, though he sed nary a word. He wuz so full of graty-tude and joy, he jest run over, an' the glis-tenin' tears run down his wrinkled face till they some way or 'nother seemed to wash them wrinkles all away slicker 'n a whistle; and the little ole man's face looked be-u-ti-ful, as he wuz a-lookin' up at the star.

"Then he sez, soft-like to hisself: 'I ain't a-wonderin' thet even the stars take to jour-neyin' arter this Prince o' Good-will and Peace, 'cause the little taste of 'em I've bin

a-gittin' sence I left home shows me they ain't nothin' else worth havin'. I'm a-goin' to try to keep up with this 'ere star and git to the Prince soon 's ever I kin.'

" 'I feel so chipper like,' sez he to the wise men, 'you jest pile all the bundles ye kin on me, an' let's be a-followin' thet there star or it may be a-gittin' away from us.'

"The three wise men looked at each other and smiled.

" 'He's drapped purty nigh all the burdens they is to drap,' sez one, 'and made our journey awful easy pickin'.

" 'When the wise men thought they 'd better be a-stoppin' to eat, the little ole man wuz a-worryin' fer fear the star 'ud git away from 'em.

" 'But one of them wise men sez, sez he: 'Why, my little friend, thet there star's the messenger of the Prince of Good-will! When ye wuz hungry, we all wuz a-wantin' ye to

stop an' eat; thet wuz good-will on our part. But the Prince of Good-will, he's got all the good-will they is to hev. So 's now, he 'd be a-wantin' us to eat when we're hungry a million times more 'n we'd be a-wantin' ye to eat.'

"The little ole man looked up at the star rale worried-like. The star wuz a-standin' still—as still as cud be—an' a-winkin' an' a-smilin' at the little ole man.

"'Ain't it the beatenist thin',' says the little ole man, right out loud, 'as when ye git a little bit o' good-will, everythin' ye do makes everyone happy and everythin' everybody else's a-doin' makes ye happy? Why, even thet there star looks happy to the bustin' pint, ef it did hev to stop!'

"Then, the three wise men looked at each other an' smiled an' give the little ole man the best meal he ever et.

"An' then, they all journeyed on, more

joyfuller than before; an' purty soon thet there star began to glitter an' to twinkle so awful much ye could n't look straight at it without a-squintin',—it wuz thet bright.

"Then the three wise men knew they wuz gittin' near their Prince, an' they dropped down on their knees, an' lifted up their faces, an' thanked God fer a-bringin' 'em so clost to the Great Prince. An' the little ole man, when he seen wot they wuz a-doin', he drapped down, too, an' done the same. An' all their faces shone like the sun, an' so did their clothes, too. An' then the star led 'em on till they come to a barn-like place, an' the star went right in an' stood stock-still over a straw bed, where a little baby wuz a-layin' in its mother's lap. An' they wuz a wonderful bright light all 'round the little baby's head thet lighted up the hull manger. An' the little ole man wuz all choked up with joyfulness, fer he felt thet this wuz the



grandes' sight in all the world; and Goodwill and Peace seemed to be a-rainin' down on every side.

"Then, he seen that the three wise men hed drapped down on their knees agin and wuz singin' a song.

" 'Hosanna!' sez they, 'in the highest, and on earth, peace; good-will to men!' An' the star, it seemed to be a-singin', too. An' a hull lot of be-u-ti-ful voices thet did n't seem to belong to no one, jined in. Then the little ole man seen the three wise men givin' wonderful gifts to the little baby, an' he felt awful bad 'cause he had n't nothin' of his own to offer 'im. An' one o' the wise men seen how he felt an' sez to him: 'Yer more'n welcome to our gifts, but if ye'd rather be a-givin' somethin' o' yer own, it ain't fur to your rich persessions. Jest journey on there an' bring back somethin' of yer very own to give to the babe.'

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"The little ole man's face lengthened out sorrerful-like. 'They ain't no rich persessions worth a-havin' nowheres but right here,' sez he. 'I ain't nothin' to give but my gratitude and love, but my heart's clean full o' them.'

"Jest then, the little baby smiled, an' held out his arms to the little ole man. An' the mother smiled an' held out the baby to 'im. An' the little ole man took the baby an' held 'im closer an' closer an' closer—till thet light thet was 'round the baby's head wuz all round the little ole man, too. And the little ole man looked wonderful and shiny, an' the three wise men got up awful still an' went on their way.

"Then, the little ole man sez, soft-like, with his face all full o' glory: 'Let them as care fer rich persessions hev 'em, but as fer me, I'd ruther hev good-will and peace then anythin' in all the world. Oh, please, jest

let me stay an' serve you and the sweet baby anyways I kin; I'd be willin' to work awful hard so 's I may jest keep near ye allus.'

"Then, the mother put her hand on the little ole man's head, like a bennydiction, and sez: 'It don't matter where ye go, whether far or near, he'll be with ye alway.'

"And the little ole man sang 'Hosanna!' with all the angels, an' he know 'd thet it wuz true."

CHAPTER XV  
PUTTING GLORY INTO GOOD

**A**UNT ELOISE had not moved once throughout the story. She had forgotten that she was eavesdropping. She had just been drinking in the sweetness of the tale, told in that tender full voice—drinking it in as if it were hers by rights.

After it was finished, she heard Billy say, brokenly: "Why, Huldy, that's a regular Christmas story—and was the little Christ always with the little old man after that?"

"Yes, thet he wuz," answered Huldy, "an' he's allus with us all when we knows thet they ain't nothin' really worth havin' but love and good-will, an' when we tries hard to git 'em. An' some ways or 'nother, when I'm up against a awful big problem, they ain't nothin' like a Christmas story to help

me out. They fits into every day in the year, as nothin' else kin. It wuz a lot o' help to me to see as how, as mean as thet little ole man wuz, he wa'n't too mean to git good-will wen he wuz willin' to work fer it."

"If I'd heard thet story first, I'd never have said I would n't help, Huldy;" cried Martha Louise, tearfully.

"Nor I!" cried Hank and Billy simultaneously.

"Oh, Huldy," cried Whistle in an awed voice, "did you say you made up that beautiful story? Oh, Huldy, Huldy, you are so wonderful!"

Aunt Eloise heard nothing more. Something in her heart—perhaps something of regret—pained until it sickened her. Her head fell limply back on the hard rocker, and the little parcel dropped to the floor.

I do not know how long it was before Billy came out and found her thus. "Oh, Huldy,"

he cried, running breathlessly in, "Whistle's Aunt Eloise is out on our porch awful sick!"

Huldy never stopped to question or to express surprise. She just got up quickly and followed Billy to the porch. All the children had rushed out excitedly, but Huldy motioned them all back but Whistle, whom she sent for a glass of water.

She sat down calmly beside Aunt Eloise, and gently lifting her head from its hard resting place, drew it to her breast, as she had done so many, many times with Whistle.

"Pore lamb!" she said, with ineffable tenderness, patting Aunt Eloise's cheek as she spoke. "She'll be fine 's a fiddle in a minute, so don't ye be a-gittin' anxious, Whistle boy!"

Huldy did n't know that it was n't anxiety that made the tears well in Whistle's eyes. That it was just the thrilling strangeness of the situation. There was Aunt Eloise, who

had said everything she could think of against his Huldy, with her head limply buried on Huldy's breast and Huldy's kind hand stroking her cheek, for all the world as if Aunt Eloise had never said anything unkind about her. Of course, Huldy did n't know, but that would n't have made any difference, anyhow, with *her*. "Hers is the kind of love that's so deep down it ain't touched by anything mean," mused Whistle.

Just then, Aunt Eloise's eyelids began to quiver and her eyes slowly opened. Whistle's heart throbbed fast, and his hand trembled so that the water which he held slopped over a little on Huldy's hand.

"Why, lovey," said Huldy softly and soothingly, "don't ye be so agytated about yer aunt! She—she's—all—right! Jest ye see!"

Aunt Eloise's eyes were wide open now, and she was looking straight at Whistle.

Also, she had heard what Huldý had said, and there was a sweet, dreamy sense of satisfaction in her heart. She had been ill, and Whistle was troubled about her. It was beautiful to be troubled about! Whistle did care! Her eyes closed again, and she sank cosily back.

“Take a sip o’ water, kin ye, dearie?” said Huldý tenderly, raising Aunt Eloise’s head.

Then Aunt Eloise’s eyes opened wide and looked straight up into the sweet face bending over her. She never moved, but she just looked steadily into Huldý’s face. She looked into deep, dark eyes of blue—eyes so unspeakably tender and loving that Aunt Eloise just dreamily began to wonder how it could ever be possible for eyes to talk that way of love. She watched with fascinated intentness the dark, curling lashes as they rose and fell. She watched the creamy cheeks



with the glow of roses in them. She watched the full red lips as they bowed into a radiant smile,—a smile which made rare dimples in the rosy cheeks, and showed two rows of strong, straight pearly teeth. A smile that filled Aunt Eloise with wonder—it seemed to come from such a depth of joy! She looked at the curling, gold-brown hair, which formed a very halo 'round the lovely face. Aunt Eloise looked and looked—till the contagion of it made a glow come to her own pale cheeks and a smile tremble on her own lips, and in her heart there thrilled something of the tenderness that spoke through Huldy's eyes.

"Huldy!" said Aunt Eloise softly—the hated name sounded beautiful to her as she spoke it. "Huldy!" she whispered again.

"Yes, jest Huldy!" answered the tender voice; "an' ye're all right now, dearie! Got roses in yer cheeks an' a smile on yer lips. An' roses and smiles comes from *right*—every

time; don't they, Whistle boy?" Whistle's heart was too full for speech—full to bursting of gratitude and joy.

"Yes, I think I am all right," said Aunt Eloise, reluctantly and almost bashfully raising her head from its resting place. "I can not imagine how I came to lose myself that way! I never did such a thing before! I—I came over to bring a message from Mrs. Foster—and—a little parcel—where—where is it?"

"Here it is!" cried Whistle joyfully, picking up the little package from the floor.

"Ye wuz p'r'haps a bit over-tired and het up," said Huldry soothingly. "Why, now, yer as fine as ef it ain't never a' happened."

"Yes, I really—am," said Aunt Eloise, rising slowly, and sighing ever so little. "I must deliver my message now with the parcel, and then I must be going; for I fear it is getting very late. Mrs. Foster said to tell

you that she would have all the picnic luncheon put up ready to serve, and you may have it very early to-morrow morning. And, too, Mr. Foster has secured enough cars to take all of you to and from the picnic. The parcel contains something which Mrs. Foster wishes you to wear to-morrow, I believe."

"Now, ain't thet jest too kind and thoughtful of 'em both!" cried Huldy joyously; "ye jest say as I thanks 'em with my hull heart—an' the childurn'll be *so* pleased!"

Whistle's face glowed with pleasure as he clapped his hands and exclaimed, "Great of 'em, was n't it Huldy—simply great!" Then he turned to Aunt Eloise with an outstretched arm and a bow that was a bit embarrassed. "You 'd better lean on me, Aunt Eloise. I'm—I'm strong all right."

Aunt Eloise took hold of the sturdy arm with a thrill of pride and joy that lay so deep it just could n't help but show outside.

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Huldy saw it, of course. She watched them as they went slowly down the street, Aunt Eloise leaning perhaps a trifle more heavily than was necessary on Whistle's arm.

"Blessed little lamb!" said Huldy, yearningly. "They wuz a time thet it seemed as 'f all them applections did n't do no good. But I'm blest ef the child ain't got 'em all stowed away somewheres, fer he's a usin' on 'em all jest of late. It 'ud orter be a lesson to ye, Huldy," she sighed, "never agin to git discouraged, no matter how dark thin's look, fer they ain't nothin' too bad to put a heap o' glory into



good. Jest look at Aunt Eloise, fer instance."

Neither Aunt Eloise nor Whistle said one single word on the way home from the Willises. The heart of one of them was full of gratitude and joy and pride to a degree that almost had to cry out, "Did n't I tell you that my Huldy was a peach?"

But an inside politeness, that was fast developing these days, and that was spelled k-i-n-d, put up a barrier of such proportions that Whistle stifled the exclamation.

As for Aunt Eloise, her heart was full of many things—things so new to Aunt Eloise that one would have thought they would have quite overpowered her.

The biggest one of these new things was tenderness. It was strange that, being new, it did n't feel queer to Aunt Eloise—but it did n't! It only felt sweet and soothing. Then, another of the new things was humil-

ity. That did feel a little queer to Aunt Eloise, but it was n't so hard to bear, after all, when she was leaning heavily on the strong little arm that seemed glad to have her there. Humility sometimes seems to need something a bit strong to lean on, just until it gets used to itself and knows how very strong it really is. Then, there was gratitude—gratitude to Whistle for not saying "I told you so!" And this gratitude brought on the tenderness again. The humble leaning on Whistle's arm brought it on again, too. So after all, perhaps tenderness was the thing that filled Aunt Eloise's heart up full.

Neither one of them spoke a single word, but they looked such a huge volume of words that Mother gasped, "More riddles!" to herself, as Aunt Eloise quietly took her seat again on the porch and Whistle went whistling softly down the street to the Willises.

Both of them followed the little figure

with brightening eyes. He looked very erect and commanding.

"How straight and fine Whistle looks to-day!" said Mother softly, and Aunt Eloise answered dreamily,—

"How could I ever have thought the little fellow looked like Great Uncle George?"

CHAPTER XVI  
HULDY'S ROMANCE

**T**HE next day—the day of the picnic—was a wonderful day. It was wonderful in other ways, besides the picnic.

In the first place, the day itself was wonderful. Whistle noted what a lovely blue the sky was, and how snowy white the tiny clouds. He noted how big and splendid and cool the trees looked, and how green and soft the grass; the poppies, too, appeared saucy and brilliant and strong. He remembered how they had looked that day through the dining-room window.

“You sure do see things from the inside!” he mused.

From start to finish, that particular picnic was the greatest success any picnic ever had been. Flying over the woody roads in cars



that were Father's treat, Whistle felt gratitude to an extent that just had to sing itself out. All the children felt so pleased, too, they had to join in the song. Even though Whistle's Father did n't belong privately to them, were they not, one and all, sharers in his bounty?

It was a rousing song that rose above the dust-clouds, and made many a farmer lad and lassie look with curious longing down the road. For long after the cars were quite out of sight and the dust had settled, the joyous song trailed on, bearing an echo of the freedom and ecstasy of youth to each listening heart.

Huldy had thought up a dozen or more brand new games, which seemed to hit just the right spot with everyone. Then, the little creek felt so cool and delightful to bared feet! The branches of the great trees swung so conveniently low, too, over the bubbling

water—one could sit on them and dabble one's toes delightfully.

Then the picnic luncheon! "Did n't I tell ye," said Huldy, joyously, "thet yer all bein' so lovin' 'bout helpin' with them sandwiches would make 'em taste twict as juicy an' fine? An' wuz they ever anythin' thet tasted so grand as thet surprise lunch yer maw sent, Whistle boy? She wuz jest thet kind and lovin' when she done it, thet it's oozed out in every single vittle in thet hull basket! My, but wa'n't them pies jest lootious!"

Whistle swallowed down a lump of joy that was most too big to manage, but it felt good, even if he did choke a trifle.

Once Whistle caught Huldy sitting by herself with just a suggestion of sadness in her deep eyes.

"Why, Huldy, dear," whispered he, bashfully, for Whistle seldom used terms of en-

dearment, even to Huldy. "Is—is—there anything the trouble?"

"Nothin' in the world, lovey! On'y, we wuz jest hevin' sech a beatin' time, I wuz a-wishin' everybody cud a bin 'ere—yer paw and maw an' yer Aunt Eloise, too—an'—an' mebbe Lem Billin's, fer instance."

Whistle caught right here his very first glimpse of real romance. He caught it in Huldy's voice and eyes. He patted her hand softly, and then went to get a pail of water at the spring, just to get away from Huldy's eyes and to be where he could think a minute or two of this last and most wonderful revelation of all.

"Well," mused he, as he drew up the sparkling water, "there ain't anyone more worthy of Huldy than Lem. But it 'ud make anybody hustle some to be worthy of Huldy—even Lem!"

As Whistle was returning with his pail of

water, an automobile drove up the road with a flourish, and a tall, dapper-looking man leaped out before the car had nearly come to a stop.

"I wonder who's the swell gink," thought Whistle, regarding the stranger curiously. "Looks like he's some rushed, too! Gee, but that is sprinting!"

The man had crossed the daisy-field in a jiffy and had gained the picnic grounds. He looked anxiously about for a moment; then he spied Huldy, sitting by herself where Whistle had left her. He snatched off a very new-looking white felt hat and fairly leaped through the intervening space between himself and Huldy.

"Blamed if that ain't Lem Billings! Don't that beat the Dutch!" quivered Whistle, excitedly. And again, an inside politeness, which was spelled k-i-n-d, mingled with the recent revelation he had gained through

Huldy's eyes, turned Whistle back over the road to the spring to refill his pail.

So it chanced that nobody just happened to see the meeting between Lem Billings and Huldy.

There were many wonderful things occurring on that picnic day!

Huldy, with the sadness all gone out of her lovely eyes, and a bashful sweetness there to take its place, thought she had never seen anything so wonderful in all her life as Lem Billings appeared at that moment. He looked as if *right times* were the only times at which he ever could be seen again. His eyes were clear and steady and unafraid. His hair curled entrancingly about his forehead. His cheeks bore the glow of health and happiness, and there was something about his straight attitude that spoke of manhood and mastery.

Lem was dressed, too, with such scru-



*Huldy's glance had fallen to the ground, but the color came and went in her cheeks in a way that made Lem's heart bound*

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pulous neatness and style. His very light gray suit looked perfection in its every detail to Huldy. The purple tie fell crisply over the lavender and green-plaited bosom of his shirt. His shoes and hat matched in snowy whiteness.

"Why, Lem," whispered Huldy, in a curiously subdued voice,— "Why, Lem, ye never sent no answer to my letter, an' I thought mebbe thin's was kinder hard with ye—but—but I ain't never seen ye look so fine and prosperous! Has suthin' happened ye, Lem?"

Lem, drinking in the sweetness of Huldy's waving hair and glowing cheeks and tender eyes and smiling lips, answered hazily: "Nothin' but yer letter, Huldy! Nothin' but wot thet kid sed 'bout growin' up to be a good man like"—Lem's voice broke—" 'Ere he comes, bless his little heart!" said Huldy, softly.



Then, Lem caught Huldy's hand and squeezed it hard as he whispered hastily:

"An' Huldy, dearie, I got suthin' else to tell ye! Mr. Willis got hitched up yestiday to the kids' Aunt Minnie. I wuz 'round to the house a-lookin' fer ye, an' the new Miz Willis come to the door a-smilin', and sez as how they planned fer her to be there to-night fer to surprise the kids. But she sez as I was to tell ye, ef I seen ye."

There was perfect joy in Lem's eyes. "Ain't ye surprised, Huldy?"

Huldy's glance had fallen to the ground, but the color came and went in her cheeks in a way that made Lem's heart bound.

"No, I can't say as it's much o' a surprise to me, Lem," she answered, softly. "I wuz sort a' expectin' on it, but not so soon 's this. I wuz just a-wonderin' a bit ago wot I'd do when the new Miz Willis come."

The flush lingered long in Huldy's cheeks

this time. "They ain't no cause to be a-wonderin'," answered Lem, softly, "an' Huldy, dearie, don't ye be a-feelin' sore about me not answerin' yer letter! I jest felt I'd better be *a-doin'* thin's 'stid of *sayin'* 'em! I jest could n't feel 's 'f I hed the right to be addressin' o' ye, Huldy, when I was all growed up with bad smellin' weeds,—seems like I'd got to git some of 'em out fust! Wot ye wrote in yer letter thet Whistle sed made them weeds show up suthin' awful! Seems like they was n't nothin' but weeds to see. Sence then, I've bin a-doin' some weedin' Huldy."

Two big tears rolled down Huldy's cheeks and dropped off, quite unheeded.

"They ain't nothin' in the world, Lem, dearie, 's shows up weeds like love an' trust. An' they ain't nothin' like love and trust to make us want to be a-weedin' of 'em out neither."

CHAPTER XVII  
AN INSPIRED IMPULSE

**W**HILE the picnic was progressing, Aunt Eloise was bravely trying to smother down an unaccountable sense of loneliness.

“The little fellow was not here yesterday and he will not be here all day to-day,” she whispered, “but—but I am so glad he is having such a happy time! I wonder if Huldy will tell them stories.”

Then, Aunt Eloise fell to musing deeply about the mean little old man who didn’t know that he needed nothing in all the world but good-will.

“My, but he was the meanest little old man, and still he found good-will when he truly tried to get it—just as Huldy said.” Aunt Eloise sighed softly. “I believe I am

beginning to see that no matter how bad things seem to be, they can be made to put glory into good. Those three wise men, through their loving interest and kindness to the little old man, brought out the desire in him to turn from his evil ways; and when he did turn, he surely gained a wonderful good!"

"I do believe I seem to see a little in that covering up of a big *unkind* with a bigger *kind*, too!"

Then, Aunt Eloise's glance rested on the heirloom trunk and she flushed painfully. "I—I—did not succeed in finding that sad little letter of poor George's the other day, when I had intended showing it to Whistle. I will just look it up now and destroy it, then—it will never cause pain to any one again. I—I wonder if a little more love would have kept poor brother George at home? I hope that pitiful likeness of him was destroyed,

too; doubtless it was picked up and burned, and is quite safely out of the way. I fear—I am rather losing my regard for heirlooms.”

Aunt Eloise searched and researched through the trunk, but the tiny yellow note was nowhere to be found.



“Where can it be?” she queried excitedly. Then she suddenly remembered all about it. Many years ago she had put it in the back of the frame that held Uncle George’s picture. She had placed it there for safe-keeping.

“Ah, well! I feel assured both the picture

and note have been destroyed long since," she mused contentedly. "How could I have thought that Whistle boy resembled Uncle George? Oh, how could I! I really would like very much to do something real kind for Whistle to—to—cover up some of the—unfortunate things that have happened. I—well—of course—I did not know Huldy!"

Then, a joyous light came into Aunt Eloise's face. She closed the heirloom trunk with an emphatic bang and went down the stairs almost as fast as Whistle himself could have done.

Mother looked up in surprise as she breathlessly entered the living-room.

"Why—Aunt Eloise!" cried Mother, rising hurriedly. "What has happened?"

Aunt Eloise stopped and flushed guiltily. "I—I just came down—hastily—to try to stop Julian before he leaves. I—I had wished to have a little surprise for Whistle

when—when he comes home from the picnic. I heard Julian say that he so wished to have a bicycle.—I—I wish Julian to buy the very best one he can find—right away, Gertrude, right away—to-day—so that I can have it to-night to surprise Whistle. Surely Julian has not gone?”

“No—no—dear Aunt Eloise, he is on the porch—and, oh, it *is* the dearest thing for you to do!”

Mother's eyes were full of tears as she rushed up to Aunt Eloise and gave her one of those delightfully unnecessary and not-to-be-expected kisses.

And this is how still another wonderful thing happened on that great day of the picnic.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### A PEACHY PRODUCTION

**T**HERE was the sweetness of peace in the Foster household on that night of the picnic. There was so much of good-will there that peace could n't possibly have been absent.

Father and Mother were very happy because they had played so generous a part in the success of the picnic, and, too, they were more than delighted over the new bicycle. Aunt Eloise was fairly thrilled with joy because of the happiness the wonderful new wheel brought to Whistle.

He had waited to help Huldy unload the baskets and pails, so he had come running home, alone, from the Willises, full of the news of the picnic—of the new Mrs. Willis—of Lem Billings.



The family and the wheel were arranged in spectacular array on the front porch as Whistle rushed up.

"I got such a lot of things to tell!" cried he, breathlessly—then he spied the wheel.

"Whee! What a humdinger! Whose is it?" he cried, stopping short.

"It's yours" said Aunt Eloise, softly, her heart beating high.

"Mine!" said Whistle tremulously, "mine—you're joking!"

As he said it, something told him it was not a joke at all,—that that glittering beauty was all his very own. He went over to it and patted the leather seat lovingly, and touched with gentle, reverent finger-tips, the shiny spokes.

There were tears in Whistle's eyes and in his voice as he quavered,—“Who—where”—and then quite broke down.

“Your Aunt Eloise, lad,” said Father,



*"Mine!" said Whistle, tremulously, "mine—you're  
joking!"*

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tremulously—"your Aunt Eloise bought it for you to-day."

"Aunt Eloise!" cried Whistle,—“no—I —” and then he made a dash at Aunt Eloise and gave her such a terrific unnecessary-and-not-to-be-expected hug that she never in all her life afterwards forgot the way it felt. As for Whistle, he never remembered how it felt, for he never realized that he had done it at all.

The next thing the family saw was Whistle flying down the street like a streak of light. He was only gone a few moments, however, and when he returned he was quite master of himself.

"Gee! but ain't it the peachy production!" cried he. "Met old Bent round the corner doing an errand for his dad—his bike looked like a lumber wagon 'side mine!" There was an extra accent on the *mine*.

They all listened with childlike exhilara-

tion to Whistle's repeated overflowings of gratitude and joy.

"Seems like it's a regular wonder day!" he thrilled.

"You said you had lots of things to tell, Whistle boy, when you first came in, did you not?" asked Mother, curiously.

"Sure I did," answered Whistle, "but that bike made me forget 'em all—and it ain't any wonder!"

Then he told all about the splendid picnic—told of the children's delight in the cars Father had provided—of Mother's marvelous basket of goodies—of Huldy's games—of the unequalled success of it all. Then he told of the arrival of Lem Billings in his faultless attire and of Mr. Willis's new wife—but he said nothing at all of the tale Huldy's eyes had told—nothing until Mother exclaimed suddenly, "Now, I'm going to ask Huldy to come back to us for a

time, if the Willises are willing! I have some odds and ends of sewing I can give her to do, and she needs a rest."

"That will be fine," cried Father. "Huldy's just like sunshine about the house."

And Aunt Eloise said nothing, but there was a queer thrill of expectation in her heart. Then, Whistle went up to Mother and whispered softly, "That'll be great, Mother, but you 'd better not lose any time, for—I think—Lem Billings has his eye on Huldy!"

## CHAPTER XIX

### AN EXCHANGE OF CONFIDENCES

**T**HAT was how it happened that three days later, Huldy, rosy and smiling, came bag and baggage to spend a few happy weeks in her old home—"jest to help Miz Foster out a bit with her sewin'," she explained. Mother had to make this excuse to get Huldy to come at all. Huldy never would have consented to come just for a rest.

And Huldy had been forced to explain to the Willises, too, something of her future plans—her plans and Lem's—to gain their consent to her leaving at all. Even as it was, there was emphatic resistance on the part of the Willises.

When Mother found Whistle's suspicions substantiated in regard to Huldy and Lem, she put away even such excuses of odd jobs

as she had conjured up for Huldy's busy hands to do, and fairly forced her into the preparation of her own wedding outfit.

Ah, those were happy days for Huldy! Lem came every night, looking straight and splendid, and with such a world of contentment in his eyes. They sat out in the yard where the old elm tree had stood, under the twinkling stars, and planned and planned.

Huldy watched with delight a tiny new elm tree pushing sturdily up where the old one had stood. "Look a' there, Lem dear," said she, dreamily, "at thet smart little tree. It's as spunky and bright as 'f it wa'n't a offshoot of thet old rotten tree. I am allus a sayin' Lem, they ain't nothin' so bad but it can put a whole heap o' glory into good, some way 'r 'nother."

"Sometimes it seems ter take a rousin' smash to git the glory goin', though," said Lem softly.



"Yer jest wonderful on applections these days, Lem," answered Huldy, proudly. "It sure does seem to take suthin' purty ordnery



sometimes to git us all waked up, Lem, dear. When Whistle's Aunt Eloise first come 'ere to visit, I'll own the clouds wuz a-gatherin' purty dark over the pore little fellow's head.

They wuz jest sech awful black clouds, Lem, dear, thet his maw and paw wa'n't able to lose sight of 'em. They jest felt obleedged to help clean 'em out. An' they set to work, and helped, and Whistle boy helped, and Aunt Eloise, she helped, too. Seems like she jest sprung up fresh from the roots like this 'ere little elm tree."

"An' I suppose ye did n't help none, Huldy—ye never do!" broke in Lem.

Huldy disregarded the interruption—"an' them clouds all jest naterally melted into nothin'. An' my, but ain't the sky fair and blue 'round 'ere now! Jest think o' that beautiful wheel, too, thet Whistle's aunt bought fer 'im! Whistle boy ain't a-needin' me no more, Lem, dear. It's a purty sight to see his maw and paw with 'im, now. They look at 'im with rale pride an' pleasure, Lem, dear. An' as fer his aunt, why, she's jest rale soft on 'im, and Whistle hisself is thet gos-

serpy and full of life and fun, it jest makes yer heart sing; an' he's gettin' so straight and self-persessed, too! Ain't he the happy kid over thet there bicycle? No, Lem, dear, Whistle boy ain't a-needin' Huldy much these days."

"But Lem is," he whispered, tenderly.

These were happy days for Father and Mother, too.

"Whistle is developing so splendidly, dear," Father said, proudly, one day. "I saw him on his bicycle to-day, and thought how straight and manly and neat he looked."

"Yes," emphasized Mother, "and he's so full of life and fun! Do you know, Julian, I think he has a very keen sense of humor; and I was noticing to-day, that his hair is growing darker; it's really a lovely shade in the sun, and his freckles—I don't seem to notice them much of late,—*has* he freckles, Julian?"

"I *think* he has—a few—dear, but I—really rather like freckles."

"And, O Julian, it is so touching to see Aunt Eloise's devotion to the little fellow!"

"And he is so thoughtful of her, too. It will be a hard wrench for her to leave him when Uncle Albert comes back and her visit with us is at an end, my dear," said Father.

"Yes, Julian, so it will. Isn't it a marvelous thing the way things change themselves around?"

"I am beginning to agree with Huldy, dear,—'It ain't the way thin's are thet counts, it's the way ye see 'em,' " answered Father.

"Maybe there is a little truth in that," said Mother, thoughtfully.

"And Julian, isn't Huldy's happiness the sweetest thing you ever saw? She just broke down and cried like a baby yesterday when I told her about your buying that checked silk dress for her to be married in. I really be-

lieve I've never found more pleasure in anything than helping on this wedding outfit."

"Gertrude, I'm thinking that Huldy is right again when she says that 'it ain't thin's outside o' us thet makes us happy, but thin's inside o' us.' "

"I suppose that is so," said Mother softly. "Huldy is always right."

"And Lem—why it's perfectly wonderful the way he has spruced up. He's doing well in his business, too, they say. He's very straight and dependable, and, Gertrude, Lem says that it was our Whistle who straightened him up, and I did so want to know what he meant, but he seemed disinclined to tell me, so I did n't ask."

"Oh, Julian, how wonderful!" cried Mother, joyously. "I wonder what the little fellow did?"

## CHAPTER XX

### THE CONVERSION OF AUNT ELOISE

**A**UNT ELOISE had given up the puzzle. It had worked itself out into the sweetest sense of peace and happiness she had ever known. What mattered it by what puzzling and devious ways she had reached that joyful climax?

“Someway I don’t seem to be Eloise Foster any more at all! Perhaps, Huldy might understand the situation,—Huldy understands everything,” she would muse.

It was Aunt Eloise’s great joy to have Huldy come and sit in her room and sew on the wedding outfit. Aunt Eloise herself was making some beautifully dainty under-garments for Huldy to wear on her wedding day. Huldy’s joy in them fairly thrilled Aunt Eloise.

How she did love to watch the bent head with its waving locks; how she loved to watch the color come and go in Huldy's cheeks, and to hear the sweet, low voice trill out its happiness and gratitude and wonderful wisdom! And the "applections," they were the joy of Aunt Eloise's heart.

"Huldy, where do you find so much wisdom?" asked Aunt Eloise, earnestly. "There never seems to be a single trying situation that you cannot immediately see a way to surmount."

"Why, Miz Foster," Huldy answered, modestly, "it jest makes me 'shamed to hear ye talk 'bout my wisdom. It's allus bin a sore trial to me thet I ain't hed no eddycation, 'specially on account of the childurn. All I've ever bin able to do wuz jest to love. Thet's allus bin a rale comfort to me, Miz Foster—thet it did n't need no eddycation to love people. Trouble is, Miz Foster, I ain't



*It was Aunt Eloise's great joy to have Huldry come and sit in her room and sew on the wedding outfit*



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ever bin able to love as much as I'd like; ef I hed, I would n't never have felt like condemnin' and hatin' an' all-riled-up-like; and I'd a' bin able to help people more. Thet's the reason I took to whistlin', Miz Foster, jest 'cause I wuz thet weak I couldn't seem to allus be lovin' quick 'nough, so I jest whistled to remind me. Every time I'd start a' gittin' riled up, I'd whistle, an' it helped out wonderful."

"Oh, Huldy, I have so wished to know about the whistling—just what it meant. I asked Whistle boy one day, but he did n't seem able to explain it. It is just wonderful, Huldy, the way he overcomes his temper through whistling!"

"Yes," said Huldy, gratefully. "I learned 'im to do it when he wuz a little feller, jest 'cause it 'ud bin sech a help to me, an' he did seem to hev sech a high temper. But I dunno as he ever did raly understan'

why he done the whistlin'—but I'm sure he does know ye can't never git nowheres 'cept by bein' lovin'."

Aunt Eloise turned away to wipe something off her cheek. "Huldy," she asked, softly, "do you think I could learn to whistle? I have tried, but I can't seem to make even a sound."

Huldy did n't even smile. She did n't see the slightest thing to smile about.

"Ef thet seems hard fer ye, Miz Foster," she answered tenderly, "p'r'aps the Miz Jones applection might be a comfort to ye. It wuz a help to Whistle."

Aunt Eloise brightened. "Tell it to me slowly, Huldy, so I shall understand. It would be a comfort to find something that would take the place of whistling."

So Huldy told the Miz Jones applection, slowly and emphatically, and Aunt Eloise listened eagerly.

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"Oh, Huldy, that is splendid," she cried. "I feel quite sure I can use that 'applection' with great profit!"

"But," said Huldy, "I'm a thinkin' ye won't need no whistlin' nor applections neither, Miz Foster; Whistle sez everybody is thet lovin' and kind, they ain't no cause to ever whistle no more over nothin' in this house."

"If I am kinder, Huldy, I think it is Whistle himself who has brought it about, and not my own effort. Whistle has been very loving, Huldy."

"Thet's jest what I wuz tellin' 'im, Miz Foster. Love ain't the kind o' thin' thet jest works fer 'im thet sets it a goin'. It's like the sunshine—it makes everythin' grow thet it falls on. It never spots no one person and helps 'im out an' fergits the rest—it helps everyone thet it lights on."

"When I wuz a little gal, I seen somethin'

one time as taught me they wa'n't nothin' but love. S' often it's a very little thin' thet makes your hull life different, Miz Foster. I hed a teacher in a country school onc't where I went fer a few months, thet wuz as near plain angel as a body cud git. They wuz a gal in the school thet wuz awful mean. She wuz thet mean to the teacher one day thet all the hull room would a' up an' threshed 'er, but thet angel teacher—she jest smiled an' come up to thet there gal and patted down her hair, lovin'-like, and kissed 'er, an' whispered somethin' gentle in her ear. The gal broke clean down an' cried like a baby; an' the hull room cried, too, and thet gal was the best scholar in the room from thet minute on. I ain't never fergot it, Miz Foster; et's bin a-shapin' my life ever sence."

"That is beautiful, Huldy; I shall always remember that."

Aunt Eloise was thinking of a wet soft

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kiss on her cheek—the first one—and she sensed the application.

“Ye know, Miz Foster, they ain’t nothin’ thet gits a riled up feelin’ ca’med down much quicker ’n a kiss under some condishuns. It does beat all, the way a kiss kin cover up a lot o’ misery and git it buried so deep it fer-gits itself.”

“I know that is true, Huldy,” said Aunt Eloise, thoughtfully. “Yes, I do know that is true.”

She was thinking of many things. She was trying to recall a few miseries that had seemed very acute at the time, but had all become buried so deep and forgotten themselves with such startling rapidity that she could scarcely bring them back, even as distant memories.

They sat for a time in silence, then Huldy spoke. “I ain’t told no one, Miz Foster, but I would like to be a-tellin’ ye wot Whistle

done fer Lem by jest lovin' and trustin' 'im."

So Huldy told the little story, brokenly, just as Lem had told it to her, about the letter and the prayer and all.

"They's on'y one thin' thet allus leads straight up to God, Miz Foster, an' thet's love. It cud n't be no other way, fer the Bible sez He is love Hissself," quivered Huldy, tremulously.

And Aunt Eloise turned again to brush away fast falling tears.

## CHAPTER XXI

### THE GREAT SURPRISE

**O**N ONE of those bright mornings, when joy reigned unconfined in the Foster household, Whistle was taking a turn on his bicycle, the longest way round to the Willises, just to cheer them up a bit over the loss of Huldy; he was thinking deeply.

“I’ll be in the same box with the Willises before long,” he ruminated. “But—they’ve got a new mother who seems quite a slicker, and—well I’ve got a new Father and Mother that suit me O. K. Gee! but ain’t Mother pretty! I thought this morning that she was about as beautiful as Huldy; and yesterday when Father called me up and gave me a knock-down to that railroad president that was in town working out some big game, I thought my dad looked the biggest man of



the two—he sure did! Then, I got Aunt Eloise, too! My, what a dub I was, not to see her different from the start; she's a peach! Some fine of her to give me this wonder wheel! To think that I thought it would be a hard job to make friends with her! Guess I'll not be much of a soldier 'less I run up against a hotter job than that! Why, she—she just fell into my arms. The only reason she talked against Huldy was just because she did n't know her! Probably I've always been looking at Father and Mother the wrong way, too. Did n't really know 'em, I guess. I'm going to work hard in school this winter for that scholarship medal; it would please 'em all so if I could win out!"

Whistle was sitting very straight, with his head held very high. "Lucky Lem," he mused, as he stopped at the Willis gate, "he's sure carried off the prize-winner! Huldy—my, but ain't she a dream!"

"Lem said the other day, mebbe they'd have to go to another town to live. Was n't work enough in his line in town." Whistle smothered a sigh that was almost gaining the proportions of a sob. "Seems like I could n't stand that! Lem was saying he wished he could afford to buy a little farm near here, for Huldy does so love the country. Wish I had the price of a farm!"

Whistle smothered another sigh. "Guess I ain't in exactly the mood to cheer the Willis kids up," he mused. "I'll come again. Anyways, I got a heap to be thankful for."

At that moment, Whistle noticed that a very distinguished-looking stranger was approaching him, hat in hand. Whistle involuntarily snatched off his hat, revealing the shock of auburn hair.

"My lad," said the stranger, politely, "would you kindly tell me where Mr. Julian Foster lives?" Then, he came up and placed

his hand on Whistle's head so very gently, and with such a dreamy far away look in his kind eyes, that Whistle found it difficult to find his voice.

"Why—yes—indeed, sir," he stammered. "I am Mr. Foster's son—I am Whistle. I will take you home, sir."

"You are Mr. Foster's son?" said the man, even more dreamily. "Ah, I might have known! I might have known! My lad, forgive me—if my manner is a little strange! Your hair—your—your appearance, in a way—a very small way, brought back a memory—that was all. You see, I was connected with the Foster family, many, many years ago," he faltered. "I am just interested, my lad, deeply interested."

Whistle was guiding his wheel and walking straightly by the stranger's side, feeling very proud of his handsome companion. He hoped some of the kids would chance to be



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looking out and see them. The stranger had put his hand, in a friendly fashion, on Whistle's shoulder—much as if they were old cronies, you know.

"Is—is your great aunt with you, my boy? I have been told that she was—Miss Eloise Foster, I mean," asked the stranger, in a subdued voice.

"She sure is," answered Whistle, losing all sense of embarrassment in awakening interest. "Do you know Aunt Eloise?"

"I once knew her, very, very well—many years ago."

Then he turned and looked down with glowing interest into Whistle's upraised face.

"You're happy, my boy—very happy—are n't you?" Whistle gasped a little over the strangeness of the question.

"You bet I am!" he answered emphatically. "Mebbe you thought I looked down and

out when you met me? That was on account of Huldy's mebbe having to leave town. But I got a heap to be thankful for, anyways, Sir! I sure am a lucky kid."

The stranger walked on in silence, he vaguely wondered who Huldy might be, but his wonder was too vague for outward expression.

As they turned in at the gate, he spoke again, with real joy thrilling in his deep voice: "I'm awfully glad you are so happy, my lad—yes, awfully glad!"

Father was just leaving for down-town, and Mother and Aunt Eloise were standing at the door as Whistle approached with the stranger. Mother and Aunt Eloise both settled their collars a trifle, and pushed back a stray lock of hair, as they noted the distinguished-looking newcomer.

The stranger stood with bared head. His wonderful white hair glistening in the sun-

shine. His was a commanding figure, but at that moment, he seemed almost overcome with emotion.

Whistle felt it his duty to come to the front, but he did n't know the stranger's name. He felt he could n't properly introduce him.

"Father—Mother—" he faltered, "I met this gentleman down the block, looking for our house; he knew you—once—Aunt Eloise—long ago."

The stranger stepped forward, cautiously, as one not over sure of his welcome. He held out his hands to Aunt Eloise, and said, brokenly, "Eloise—sister Eloise"—that was all.

And Aunt Eloise went very pale, and then threw both arms around the speaker's neck and quavered: "Oh, George, my brother, my brother! Thank God, I have you back again! Oh, if you knew—how my



heart has ached—these last few weeks, because—because we didn't hunt you up—and bring you back, and make it all put glory into good!"

Father, hat in hand, went quietly through the gate and down the street, and Mother motioned to Whistle and they tiptoed stealthily away to Mother's room, where she cried softly on his shoulder, and he put his arm about her to hold her a bit more steadily.

"Well, I'll be jumpjiggered if it ain't Great Uncle George come back from the dead!" said Whistle, softly. "It's no wonder you women folks are a bit shaky. Say, Mother, he's some looker, ain't he?"

"Yes," sobbed Mother. "We all said you resembled him so much, my dear."

CHAPTER XXII  
AFTER MANY YEARS

**W**HAT days, full to the brim of interest, followed the surprise-arrival of Great Uncle George!

“Of all the good things that have dropped down in this neck of the woods, Great Uncle George is the best yet!” thrilled Whistle.

All the children in the neighborhood hung around the Fosters’ to get a peep at Whistle’s adventurous uncle. And no one loved their interest better than Great Uncle George himself. He would often call them into the yard, and dropping down on the velvet grass, would find himself surrounded by a multitude of curious youngsters, waiting with their mouths open in excitement, like so many hungry birdlings, to hear the wonder tales that Whistle had told about. He never

could imagine where they all came from! There always seemed to be so many more than he had invited in.

Then, Great Uncle George would tell wonderful tales of far-away lands, and marvelous peoples, and adventures, and wild animals he had known.

Yes, Great Uncle George was the thrill of the neighborhood! It was n't the children alone who were thus interested. All the intimates and near-intimates among the grown-ups were consumed with interest, too.

Said Mrs. Steed to Mrs. Munson, one day, as they noted Great Uncle George and Whistle walking chummily down the street,—“Wonderful man for his years, that Mr. Foster, is n't he? So distinguished looking. Mrs. Foster told me the other day that when he was a little boy, he looked just exactly like Whistle. She said she wished she could show us his picture taken at the age of twelve

—just Whistle's age—but that they could n't find it anywhere; it had quite mysteriously disappeared. I have been thinking for some time that Whistle was growing to be a very manly-looking little chap. I have always said he 'd turn out all right. I never did think him as homely and unattractive as most people did."

Mrs. Munson turned away in disgust. "How people do forget themselves," she sighed. "I remember one day, not so long since, when Mrs. Steed said if she had had a child like Whistle, she believed it would have killed her. But I—well, I have always rather admired the little fellow."

Great Uncle George had n't dreamed of remaining at the Fosters' when he came, but then, you see, he had n't felt quite sure of his welcome; but they had all urged him, with the greatest cordiality, to stay at his nephew's home.

At first, he had only brought over a suit case, from the hotel, where he had stored his luggage, with a few wonderful gifts from far-away lands, to offer as peace offerings. But he had felt the warmth of his welcome so keenly that after a few days he had brought his trunks over to the Fosters', too, and had promised to stay until he could formulate further plans.

Aunt Eloise and Uncle George talked untiringly of old, old times, and of intervening years, and of present conditions, and of the future, too. They seemed very close together when they talked of the old times. Memory's walls seemed to hold much the same impressions for them now. For they seemed very fond indeed as they talked of intervening years, and of a certain feeling of loneliness that seemed to be about the most distinct thing that occupied those years. Then, they had so much in common in the



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present—their joy in meeting again, their ever-increasing interest in Whistle, and their plans for his enjoyment.

Often would they dwell on the time when their visit at the Fosters' would be over,—when Aunt Eloise should have returned to brother Albert's, and Uncle George should have gone—he did n't know where! And then, there would be a long silence, when nothing was heard but a few very audible sighs. Then Uncle George would rise and say sadly: "Well, well, Eloise, my dear, we are n't as young as we used to be! It's a bit hard for old people to be roaming around the world, my dear—a bit hard."

After Uncle George had gone, Aunt Eloise would sit and wonder why it was that he often looked at her with such questioning curiosity. "I wonder if he thinks I am queer," she would sigh; "I wonder if I am queer."



## CHAPTER XXIII

### "GOD BLESS HULDY"

ONE day, after one of these long talks together, Uncle George went out of the door, hat in hand, looking very anxious indeed, and shaking his head dolefully, from time to time, as one who was in very deep waters.

"Julian is a very sensible, discriminating person," he ruminated; "I'll drop into his office and walk home with him. I'll have to have somebody's opinion, besides my own, about Eloise. It's a strange situation," he sighed, shaking his head sorrowfully.

Thus it was that Father, noting the pallor in Uncle George's face as he entered his office, begged him to be seated. And Uncle George motioned mysteriously to him to shut the door. Then, Uncle George went straight

to the point, as he had had a trick of doing all his life.

“Julian,” he began, tremulously, “I’d like your candid opinion in regard to your Aunt Eloise. Does she seem—a little—queer—at times, to you?”

Father was about to offer an emphatic dissent, but Uncle George went breathlessly on.

“Julian, I have kept it to myself ever since I have been here—but you can have no idea of the weird things your aunt says to me from time to time! Yesterday and to-day, it was unusually noticeable.” Uncle George’s voice trailed off into a mysterious whisper.

“Several times to-day and yesterday, she has alluded to big *unkinds*, which must be covered up with *bigger kinds*. Yes, I think that is what she said! Several times she has said something in a dazed way about putting *glory into good*. She also refers frequently,

in an entirely irrelevant manner, to some mean little old man or other, and some child that was always with him; and yesterday, Julian, the strangest thing of all occurred." Uncle George's voice was so low and so mysterious it scarcely could be heard at all. "Do you know, I said something to her that she seemed to resent a trifle—I have forgotten just what it was—and she said, very slowly and earnestly, as if it required deep thought: 'George, if I had n't been expecting Miz Jones to be dropping in, most any minute, I would have given you a very hasty reply.' "

"I felt instantly that there was something uncanny about this Miz Jones, and I hung around for hours, waiting for her to come, and nobody came near the house. Then, too, another thing,—she said, mysteriously, that it would be easy enough for me to overcome my temper *because I could whistle*. Julian, I really am alarmed about your Aunt, yes,

greatly alarmed! I'm beginning to think it will be best for me to get a little home near you and look after her myself. She is so fond of Whistle, too, I really fear for her when she has to be separated from him."

Uncle George had been too painfully occupied during this recital to note the amused look which was rapidly enveloping Father's face, as he had proceeded.

But when Father burst into a laugh of larger dimensions than Uncle George had ever heard in all his life before, he pulled himself up with a jerk, deeply resentful of the fact that his nephew was not properly honoring these very valid confidences and anxieties.

"Oh, Uncle George, Uncle George! have n't you met Huldy? Why, these are Huldyisms, that's all; these are 'applecations'!"

"Huldy!" burst in Uncle George. "Ap-

plecations! Yes, those are the conjuring words! Eloise is constantly quoting a person of the name of Huldy, and is constantly referring to applecations! That, too, is the name of the person Whistle mentioned when I first met him."

Father broke in again: "My dear Uncle George, you just put your mind at rest on this subject. Any person who is quoting Huldy is bound to be gaining her balance, not losing it; *I* have thought Aunt Eloise in an especially desirable mental attitude of late."

"It is n't that the attitude is undesirable, my dear nephew; it's only that it's unnatural! I am certain that I am correct in my memory of her. Eloise is three years older than I, and I used, as a child, to stand in terrible awe of her. Julian, she was unquestionably the most proper child I have ever encountered, and distant and cold, too."

Uncle George shuddered. “I think you do not understand, Julian, that no person could change so utterly without just being born again. Yes, Eloise *is* a little queer; there can be no doubt about it. But, who, pray, may



this transforming Huldy be? I recall many incidents now that make me incline towards the belief that your entire household is a trifle soft on the subject of this Huldy. But, of course, I did not know that Eloise's vagaries could be credited up to Huldy, too.

But, even so,—the conditions are quite unaccountable; yes, entirely unaccountable! Who and where—is—Huldy?"

Father chuckled joyously. "Why, Huldy is—why, she is Lem Billin's' fiancée," he gurgled, "and she has gone away for a few days because she thought the house was pretty full. Huldy has been making room for other people all her life. It's her business. She was Whistle's nurse, Uncle George, and I tell you frankly, you have a treat in store for you when you meet Huldy. Huldy is the most highly educated person, for a person of no education, I have ever met," resumed Father, magisterially.

Uncle George gave his nephew exactly the same kind of a look that he had often given Aunt Eloise, a look of frightened curiosity. Then he sighed, lengthily, and fell into a deep silence.

When Uncle George finally did look up

again, he observed that Father had lost the amused expression and was looking exceedingly serious and thoughtful. Then Father spoke, as one suffering from deep emotion:

"My dear Uncle George, I should like you to know what Huldy has done for our little boy. I feel that—you, of all people, should know; I feel that you, of all people, would understand." Father sighed heavily.

"It is n't an easy tale to tell, but you play such an active part in it yourself, I feel it is due you to know." Uncle George straightened with curiosity. "Why, Julian, you deal in mysteries. How could I possibly have played any part in doing anything for Whistle, here, when I was, to all intents and purposes, dead to you through all these years?"

Father slowly drew from his pocket a tiny, yellow, folded bit of paper, and a pink-backed photograph that had once been cut round to occupy a frame.



"There," he said, with sorrowful conviction, "those two things are a combination that might yield an active enough influence to wake the dead. I'm thinking that Gertrude and I were pretty close to the dead mark ourselves."

Uncle George took the photograph and paper from Father's outstretched hand. As he noted the homely little face on the bit of pasteboard, his hand trembled visibly. Then' tears blinded his eyes and flowed unheeded down his cheeks.

"Poor little chap!" he quivered. "O, poor little chap! What a life I led, Julian; O what a life I led! It may seem disgraceful, Julian, my boy—but I could n't—help—but run away! Had I stayed, what could I ever have been but just what—they—made me—by their attitude of shame and distrust? It was n't so much what they *said*, as their *looks*, their *manner*—O Julian, Julian, no

one who has not had the experience could ever understand the horrible degradation of having your own family eternally ashamed of you! I cannot be sorry that I ran away, Julian, my boy. Don't misjudge me; you could not understand."

"My dear Uncle—I am far from misjudging you!" answered Father tenderly, as he watched Uncle George unfold the bit of yellow paper with trembling hands. He regretted showing it to him at all. He had no idea how deeply he would be affected by this glimpse into the long ago.

Uncle George whisked away several big tears to clear his vision enough to read the time-dimmed, straggling words—

"My deer family"—the note began—"The Lord maid a mistake when he maid me into a Foster. I ain't maid ov the kind of stuf the Fosters' are maid ov. I'm goin' to try and help the Lord out ov this muss by

goin' away and tryin' to find my wright plase. Sum one may be glad fer my strong rite arm and ferget the way I look. I'm sorrie fer the way I look, but it ain't my fault. Goodbye furever,

Yours treuly,

GEORGE.

P. S.—Praps the Lord ain't all to blame, he mebbe thot you wud take kinder to me and not mind havin' me around so much. I suppose he had to put me in someweres.

GEORGE."

They would n't like it told, but Father and Uncle George sat there sobbing like two children—girls at that—and when Father at last spoke, his voice was so low and tremulous that Uncle George had to strain with all his might to catch the words at all.

"Uncle George," he said, "if it had n't been for Huldy, our little boy would have

gone—away—too! I am sure of it. Gertrude and I were—ashamed—of his looks and his awkward manner—and we—we treated him—just the way your family treated you. Yes we did—Uncle George—I tell it to my shame! But Huldy—God bless her—understood. She saw that all the poor child needed was love and trust and kindness. She bound up all the cruel wounds that Gertrude and I had torn open—and—sheltered by her love—he could not leave his home. That—was all that kept him from it, Uncle George! It was n’t our fault that he did n’t run away.”

“God bless Huldy!” said Uncle George reverently.

“And then Aunt Eloise came, and she was a degree worse than we were; and she got out this picture and showed it to us all, Whistle included, and told the poor little fellow he looked just like it— Pardon me,

Uncle George, but that picture seems never to have had the slightest thing to do with you. That was the last drop—and Whistle smashed the picture into a thousand bits, and called Aunt Eloise a pig—and—I woke up as if I'd been hit with a shaft of lightning—and Gertrude did, too. I saw just how we'd always been treating the poor little fellow—holding him down, and looking askance at him. The picture was in a frame, and that was broken all to pieces; but I picked up the photograph and the note, which, I take it, was framed up with it for safe keeping. Every time I've had any struggle with myself since—about Whistle's looks or his manners or anything else—I've just taken a look at that picture and note, and they've pulled me up with a jerk. Now, you may see what an active part you have played, Uncle George, no matter how far away you have been. Do you know," added Father with a

twinkle, "I've had a trick ever since of calling you Great Uncle George, with the accent all on the *Great*."

"And—and your aunt—what did she do—what did she say when she was called a pig?" A smile was struggling to Uncle George's lips.

"I don't seem to know what has happened since, Uncle George," replied Father thoughtfully. "I can't seem to understand. Aunt Eloise never alluded to the episode again—never even said anything about the lost picture and letter. Everything that has happened since has been entirely between herself and Whistle. Huldy, of course, is the power at the helm, but Whistle has showered attentions upon Aunt Eloise until he has made her his staunch friend—indeed, until Aunt Eloise is completely transformed. Gertrude and I are a bit transformed, too. Whole thing's a complete riddle—too much

for me! Huldy's back of it all some way—of that I am certain—though I don't know how.”

“But Whistle could n't ever have looked like—that picture—could he, Julian? He's a manly, smart-looking little chap.”

“Well,” demurred Father, “perhaps the resemblance was a little noticeable—at that time—but Whistle is a bit transformed, too.”

“God bless Huldy!” said Uncle George, softly.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### UNCLE GEORGE SETTLES DOWN

**T**HE following day Huldy came home. It was only a week till her wedding-day, and Mother had insisted upon her return. Uncle George's heart throbbed with excitement as the carriage drove up from the train, and Lem Billings leaped out and handed his radiant bride-to-be from the carriage.

Uncle George was actually hiding behind the curtain in the front room to get an advance peep at Huldy. Then he pulled himself up with a jerk: "George Foster," mused he, "I am ashamed of you—skulking about this way!" He turned with determination and walked back into the living-room, hands in his pockets and humming nonchalantly. However, he had stayed behind the curtain



until he had caught a glimpse of Huldy's sweet face and Lem's glowing countenance. "Lucky dog!" exclaimed Uncle George,— "that Lem—what's his name?"

Uncle George walked straight into Huldy and Lem, who were entering by the side door. Then the family all rushed in like an avalanche, and showered greetings and caresses upon the smiling Huldy. Lem stood back, basking in the sunshine of Huldy's popularity.

"She looks the part," mused Uncle George — "looks every inch a transformer!"

Then, Aunt Eloise cried joyfully: "Brother George, this is Huldy! Huldy, this is my brother, Mr. Foster." If Aunt Eloise had been introducing him to the Queen of England, she could n't have expressed more real deference than in those words—"this is Huldy."

Huldy advanced rather bashfully, and



*"She looks the part," mused Uncle George—"looks every inch a transformer!"*

THE ASTOR LENOX  
TILDEN FOUNDATION

ASTOR, LENOX AND  
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS

## Uncle George Settles Down 267

held out her hand. "I'm proud to know ye, sir. This is Lem Billin's, sir. I hev heard Whistle tell a lot 'bout yer wonderful travels, sir, in the torpid zone—an'—an' other far-away lands, sir."

Uncle George felt not the slightest inclination to smile. The face and voice were sweet and gentle, with a sweetness and gentility that was rooted in purity and goodness. The speech seemed to play no part in it at all.

"For a person with no education, Huldy is the most highly educated person I have ever met," quoted Uncle George, mentally and understandingly.

"I fear," replied Uncle George, dreamily, "that I am accountable for your leaving here. I understand that you went away to make more room for me. Had I known this, I should not have permitted it, Miss—Miss Huldy—but I am not guilty because I truly

knew nothing of your sacrifice. I've felt terribly about it ever since I've known it." There was real regret in Uncle George's voice.

Huldy was in her element. Here was a regret to be patched up tenderly. Huldy rose to the occasion.

"Mister Foster," cried she, joyously, "I ain't ever goin' to be able to be thankful 'nough thet I went on this 'ere visit to Miz McIntyre. I'd bin a-promisin' her to go fer years, an' jest never cud git to it! When ye come, I wuz settin' 'round 'ere in a dim re-leegious light, with my feet on a hassock, as 'twere, jest thinkin' of no one but myself an' gittin' lazier by the minute. When ye come, it wuz someway or 'nother jest like the sunshine when it comes gleamin' into a dark room and makes us see the dust and git busy. I woke up and seen they *wuz* suthin' to think of 'sides myself,—Miz McIntyre, fer in-

## Uncle George Settles Down 269

stance—an' the mean way I'd a' bin puttin' her off fer so long. I've bin thet happy with the little ole lady, an' it's brought sech a heap o' good to me, I kin never thank ye 'nough fer comin', Mister Foster, an' remindin' me."

Then, Mother patted Huldy's arm, tenderly, and said: "Uncle George, I guess that is quite true—Huldy is never so happy as when she is bringing happiness to others."

"I believe you," said Uncle George, emphatically, "and I think," he added, "that judging from her appearance, she must always be bringing happiness to others—she looks so *very* happy herself."

Then, Whistle rushed up to Huldy and asked, pleadingly, "O Huldy, Lem is n't going to take you some place else to live, is he? Can't he find enough roofing around here to do?"

Huldy's eyes sparkled with joy. "We ain't a-goin' 'way, Whistle, lovey! We jest

neither of us cud stan' the thought of it. Wot's a matter of more money aside of love, anyways? 'Course, ye kin make friends everywheres, but—I can't be a-leavin' ye all, Whistle boy—I jest can't—ye've all bin so kind to me."

"I could n't go neither, Whistle boy," said Lem, noting a tremble in his Huldy's voice and coming to the rescue. "Ef they ain't 'nough roofin', I kin find suthin' else. I ain't afeerd but I kin keep busy *now*. Whistle, I cud n't be a-leavin' ye—no more 'n Huldy," he added softly; "I jest feel 's if I never would have 'mounted to nothin' ef it had n't a' bin fer ye—an' I never kin fer-git it."

"Gee! What have I ever done for you, Lem?" answered Whistle, amazedly. "Seems like all a person has to do is just to *breathe* to get good-will around here," he added, merrily.

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Then Lem said he must be going. Just as he said it, something seemed to strike Uncle George all of a sudden. He rushed out of the room without a word, grabbed up his hat, and was out of the door and at the gate before Lem had opened the side door.

As Lem reached the gate Uncle George addressed him excitedly. "Mr.—Mr. Billin's!" he gasped.

"Lem," interrupted the other, respectfully, "Lem's my name, sir."

"Lem," proceeded Uncle George, "are you open to propositions for—for your future livelihood, I mean?"

"I sure am!" smiled Lem.

"Well," continued Uncle George; "something just popped into my thought while we were standing there. You know that place of Burns's—out here east of town—that's for sale, Lem? I've just about decided to buy that place. The fact is, I was out there



and took out an option on it this morning!"

"Whee, that's a beauty!" interrupted Lem, "job of roofing on it, sir?"

"No; but you see, Lem, my sister, Miss Foster, and I are both unencumbered, and I feel we are too old to be jogging about any more. I have thought it would be nice to have a country home, and spend the remainder of our days quietly together. But, you see, we are both well on in years, and we would be obliged to have competent people on the place to run it and care for us a bit, Lem. I'm able to give you a good thing if you and Huldy would care to consider it. My sister is very, very fond of Huldy, and you seem to suit me all right," laughed Uncle George.

Lem stood perfectly still, too full for utterance. His face was aglow with happiness and gratitude.

"Ye cud n't a' hit on anythin' thet 'ud

## Uncle George Settles Down 273

please Huldy better 'n thet! She's thet fond of the country, and thet attached to Miz Foster, and it 'ud give her a chanct to see Whistle boy often, too. I dunno 's I know much about that kinder work, sir, but I'm strong and willin' to learn. I would n't be wantin' Huldy to be workin' too hard, sir, but I cud take thin's off'n her shoulders, I'm sure."

"My sister's wants and mine would be very few, Lem. Huldy would have a great deal of time to herself."

"Mister Foster," answered Lem, "Huldy would never be happy 'less she was a-doin' suthin' fer someone she loved. Of course," added Lem bashfully, "she 'd be a-doin' fer me, but she said t' other day as thet would n't keep her busy, and she 'd hev t' find suthin' else to do. So you see, sir, this'll jest 'zackly fill the bill."

Lem held out a big brown hand which Uncle George shook emphatically.

"I can't thank ye 'nough, sir, fer a-thinkin' of us, sir! I'll jest run back and tell Huldy 'bout yer offer, sir; she'll jest run over with happiness!"

Uncle George put a detaining hand on Lem's arm.

"Not yet—Lem," he hesitated, flushing slightly. "You see, I—I—have n't said anything as yet to my—sister about the matter. I'd probably better speak to her first."

"'Bout Huldy and me, you mean, sir!"

"No—no—about the whole plan. I've said nothing to her about the Burns place and—and living together—you see." And the fun of it all smiled through Uncle George's eyes and lips. "You see, I'm quite a hasty old chap, Lem. Don't lose much time when I get started. I'll just go round and sign up those papers for the Burns place, and you can tell Huldy later—after I've fixed it up with my sister. See, Lem?"

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And Lem went down the street, shaking his head, wonderingly.

"He do beat the Dutch," he smiled,—git-tin' a place ready fer a woman 'thout her even seein' it er knowin' she's a-goin' there!"

Uncle George, after his talk with Lem, decided to broach the matter to his sister at the first opportune moment. In fact, that same day found him rapping softly on the door of Aunt Eloise's room, with his heart throbbing unusually high.

Aunt Eloise knew, the instant she opened the door, that he had something very particular on his mind. He always went straight to the point.

"Eloise—ahem!" he began. "I've been thinking that it would n't be a bad idea for us to end our years—ahem!—together. We are both quite attached to these surroundings, and to little Whistle.\* Would you consider our taking a pretty little place near town,

Eloise? Out in the beautiful country air, you know—and perhaps—just as a surmise—we could get some good man and his wife to run the place for us—say, Lem and Huldy—or someone like that? We're a long-lived family, Eloise. Probably we'd have several happy years together still. What would you think about it? And Whistle could be with us part of the time—often, indeed—he'd adore the country."

Aunt Eloise's bosom heaved tumultuously; the tears were streaming down her face. "George!" she cried, incoherently; "a home together—Whistle boy—Huldy and Lem— Oh, George—George—it is all too wonderful! I just can't take it in!"

Then Uncle George put his arm around her and patted her soothingly.

"There—there—Eloise, it's all true! I've bought a place out here east of town, and have spoken to Lem about coming, and he

## Uncle George Settles Down 277

thinks they will; so—it's all settled, Eloise, my dear."

And Aunt Eloise cried happily on Uncle George's shoulder for a few happy minutes, and then lifted up her head and smiled saucily through her tears.

"Impetuous boy!" she said, softly. "I thought you came to ask my advice!"

## CHAPTER XXV

### THE WEDDING BREAKFAST

**H**ULDY'S wedding day was just like Huldy herself—fair and bright and blooming and wonderful. Mother had decorated the house with all the late summer flowers, and it looked like Huldy, too.

All the Willesees came, big and little, but they were the only outside guests.

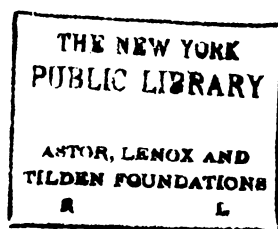
Huldy herself was radiant in her checked silk dress, and new bronze shoes, and rose pink hat. Whistle thrilled to his toes every time he looked at her; so did everybody else, Uncle George included. She was just the very personification of sweetness and joy.

Lem looked wonderful, too. Huldy had insisted upon his wearing the same things that he did on the day of the picnic—even to the purple tie. And, of course, he had



*Huldy herself was radiant in her checked silk dress, and  
new bronze shoes, and rose pink hat*





## The Wedding Breakfast 281

worn them. Even the minister had a big white aster in his buttonhole.

Everything was perfect. And the presents! Huldy and Lem could n't take them in at all. They just overwhelmed them completely. Besides all the beautiful things that Whistle and Mother and Father and the Willises had given them, had n't Aunt Eloise and Uncle George come in at the last with an order for a whole set of real mahogany furniture?

"I seen it, Huldy," whispered Lem, thrillingly. "Mister Foster showed it to me. Ye ain't never dreamed of anythin' like it!"

Then the wedding breakfast. Mother had planned everything that Huldy liked best. Huldy tried bravely to keep back the brimming tears.

"I jest can't stand no more!" she quavered, at last. "I dunno wot I ever done to hev all this kindness showered on me. Why, I feel

just like I bet thet bird felt wot got up on the highest branch o' the highest tree on the highest mountain it cud find, jest as clost to heaven as it cud git. Thet's jest the way I feel. I could n't git no higher nor stan' more joy than I'm a-standin' an' a-hevin' now!"

So they went away on their wedding trip, with Whistle boy opening the carriage door and beaming a joyous good-bye, and the family and guests calling out merry wishes with voices half joyous, half tearful, and the little Willises standing ready at the gate with an old shoe to throw after the departing carriage.

"God bless Huldy!" said Father softly.

"And Lem, too," added Mother gently, as they waved a last wave at the bride and groom.

CHAPTER XXVI  
A HAPPY BOY

**J**UST one short month later, Whistle stood at the gate of the pretty country house which used to belong to the Burnses, but which was now the home of Great Uncle George and Great Aunt Eloise—and Huldy's home, too, and Lem's.

Huldy had followed Whistle to the gate, and now he was just mounting the wonder wheel to return home.

"Huldy," said Whistle softly, "it seems as if everything is just too good to be true."

"No, lovey," they ain't nothin' thet's *good* thet ain't *true*," Huldy answered. "So it's all jest good '*nough* to be true."

"Huldy, don't it seem as if things never could have been any other way than beautiful? Why, I just can't remember any-

thing but the good things! There don't seem to be anything else, even way back as far as you can remember."

"It is surprisin', Whistle, honey, how soon we fergit the evil arter the glory's gone into good, ain't it?"

"Yes, Huldy, it is—jest 'zackly like that mean old scratch the White's cat gave me that day Aunt Eloise came. There was n't a smidgeon of it left, for all the worry it gave me, just a few days afterwards."

"Yer jest wonderful on applections, Whistle boy," said Huldy, proudly, patting him an affectionate good-bye.

Uncle George and Aunt Eloise, standing on the pretty porch in the twilight, spoke softly together.

"George, your going away as you did was very, very sad, and you will never know how much I have wished that I had been more loving, but, after all, things have worked

around to put a great deal of glory into good—have n't they, George, dear?"

"Yes, Eloise, my dear, that they have. And there is nothing to regret. I suppose all of this world's goods I have managed to accumulate on my wanderings would seem a sufficient outcome of good to many people; but, Eloise, it's all just nothing at all compared to the welcome that was given me on my return and the love that has since surrounded me."

"That's just what Huldý says," said Aunt Eloise, softly, "that there is nothing in all the world that *really* counts for anything but love." After that, they both sat a long time in silence, their hearts too full for speech. Then they both rose to wave a good-bye to Whistle.

"Dear little chap!" said Uncle George.

"God bless him!" murmured Aunt Eloise.

Then Lem came out of the dusky garden,

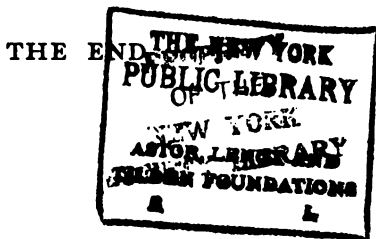
and went to the gate to meet Huldy. She turned to him with a radiant face.

"Seems like the very winders of heaven are open, Lem, a-pourin' down blessin's we ain't room 'nough to receive."

"I'm thinkin' it wuz 'cause ye hed room 'nough in yer lovin' heart, Huldy, to receive. it thet they did pour down on us. The winders of heaven are probaly allus open, Huldy, but they ain't many on us knows how to make room fer the blessin's."

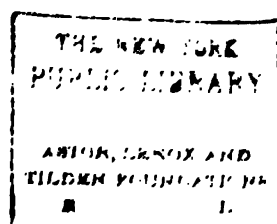
Whistle, whistling down the twilight road, mused happily as he looked back over his shoulder at the dear ones waving a farewell.

"It's a jolly good place to be, but so's my home, too. I never do know which place I'd ruther be!"









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